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# Handicapped Among the Free

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To the justice-loving people of America, North and South, the millions to whom brotherhood and fair play are something more than names, the author begs permission to dedicate the present volume. She would like to assure them that although not "founded on fact," in the sense that the particular incidents all occurred in the life of any one person, it is yet not to be regarded as a story of pure imagination. A large proportion of the incidents are actual happenings, some of them being the experiences of those whom the writer, during several long sojourns in the "black belt," has learned to call her friends.

# Handicapped Among the Free

## CHAPTER I.

"WHAT you moonin' 'bout out in de gloamin', chile, wid your face as white as a spirit dat's missed de road to glory?"

The old man stood with one hand on the door-post, the other being employed in rubbing his woolly head as he thrust it forth into the dimness creeping around the cabin. A cheery gleam of firelight shone invitingly behind him. The girl addressed turned herself toward it, revealing more plainly as she did so the face that had excited the old negro's comment. It *was* white—strikingly so—and in the half light it looked worn and weary. There was a pathetic droop of the lips, and a knitting of the broad, open brow, that were not likely to escape the keen eyes of Uncle Pete.

"What you grievin' 'bout, chile?" he asked, looking full into the girl's face as he spoke.

"He's goin', Uncle Pete. He's done decided to go a Monday."

Her voice had in it a ring as of despair.

"Glory! Hallelujah!" shouted the old man. "Why shouldn't he? Chile, you ought to be jumpin' up and crackin' yer heels together wid gladness."

Uncle Pete suited the action to the word, his stiffening limbs performing a caper more suggestive of jubilation than of grace.

The girl shook her head.

"I sho'ly can't rejoice, Uncle Pete," she said. "I say to him, 'Go,' but my heart cert'nly give the lie to my tongue."

"Nonsense, chile! Your heart got no sense in it,"

replied Uncle Pete positively. "Dat Gloss a nigger to be proud of. Chile, he gwine de way of all de great men of dis great America. Dey all get exercised 'bout dey countrymen. Dey all see dey ign'rant and want book larnin'. Dey all study and study, jes' like dat nigger Gloss, and one day dey go away and neber come back de same no more."

A quick gesture, half of dissent, half of pain, interrupted him.

"I don't want Gloss to go away and never come back the same," said the young voice, and now there was surely a break in it.

The old man held up a warning hand.

"Chile, ain't you neber heared tell 'bout George Washin'ton," he said, "how George Washin'ton and Ab'am Lincoln used to set together 'scussin' de need of dey country and dey people in dey ole log cabin jes' for all de worl' like dis one, and how dey use to stop talkin' to study and study by de light of a chunk of good fat wood, like dey couldn't larn enough, and how dey kep' on till dey knowed all dar was to know, and den dey went out and beat all dey's enemies? Chile, dat Gloss has got things by de right end. De nigger race want its great men same as de white race. Dey's got to study—now I tell ye."

The laugh which came in answer to the words for the moment metamorphosed the face into which the old man was still peering.

"I know all the arguments, Uncle Pete," the girl said. "Me and Gloss have talked till we're tired. I know he's right, and I wouldn't stop him if I could. Give Gloss a chance, and he'll prove he's something more'n a low-down nigger. He say our people can never stand no higher than the place where they climb to theyselves. He'll climb. I cert'nly don't doubt it, but—that don't make up for Gloss. It's Gloss I want."

The light faded—not the light of the sun; *that* had al-

ready almost gone; but the light which had come into the girl's face. Its departure left the lips tremulous and the eyes misty.

Uncle Pete shook his head.

"Honey, you'se tryin' to 'scape de death penalty," he said solemnly. "You sho'ly is. Chile, dar's death on de road to ebery good thing. You want dat brudder of yours to do great things. Dar's death on de road to de greatness—de death of your good time, honey. You and him have had good times, sho'ly. Dey's got to die. You can't 'scape de death penalty. Dar ain't nobody does. Why, honey, I can't chop de weeds out my corn patch widout payin' de penalty. Dat dar's de death of Uncle Pete's restin' and ease. It sho'ly am, chile.

Again her laugh rang out—a low laugh that had music in it. Then without word or sign of farewell the girl turned and walked away into the darkness. Uncle Pete stood looking after her, his head shaking ominously.

"Dat chile gwine to hab a dreffful sore heartache," he muttered.

And the "chile" went on in the dim twilight, her head held high, her hands clenched as if in pain. The way was lonely at that hour. When Uncle Pete's cabin was left behind, there was nothing on either side of the road to break the monotony of the broad cotton fields where last summer's plants stood old and black, crackling now and again in response to the sighing breath of the wind. The girl passed them with eyes that saw nothing. She walked steadily onward until the cotton fields gave place on one hand to a belt of trees. Then, suddenly, with one of those erratic movements that seemed characteristic of her, she turned aside from the roadway into the stretch of wood. From rapid walking her feet passed into a run, carrying her further from the path, till between the "gloamin'" and the shadows of the wood something like darkness enveloped her. It was then that she stopped—barely in time to escape collision with a

tall poplar, that, with weird, ghostly arms stretched to the sky, rattled in the evening breeze a dirge of death. Her hands went out to its weather-whitened trunk, girdled years ago, and bare now as the dead to which it belonged.

"I can't stand it. I sure can't. There nothin' left in the world when Gloss gone."

The strong white hands began to beat a wild tattoo on the trunk of the dead tree. A heavy sob broke from the girl's throat.

"I ain't got nothin'—nothin' in the world but Gloss!"

The last word was a sharp, low cry of pain. With it the torrent of grief broke its barriers, and the girl sobbed and wailed in a perfect abandon of sorrow. Choking sobs and smothered cries of distress alternated in giving vent to the passion of despair that had overcome her. Yet, undisciplined as was her grief, it never rose to loud outcries. She had let sorrow master her, but she had not lost all control of herself.

"Uncle Pete cert'nly say true. It never be the same no more."

The tattoo ceased. The girl's arms went round the cold tree trunk, and she slid to the ground, shaking with sobs. She was only sixteen—nothing but an overgrown child—and her heart was breaking with sorrow. It was such a common sorrow, the parting with the one being she loved, the breaking up of a life that was all the gladness she had ever known. The world cannot stop for heartaches, even though, to the victim, the pain seems an ache unto death.

The cries had stopped now, but the sobs were heavier and more choking. Darkness descended around her, but the girl's arms still clasped the cold, dead trunk.

"It goin' to be dark always when Gloss gone."

The words came in low, mournful strain between the sobs. As they merged into another sob a sound struck upon the speaker's ear. It was the loud, cheery whistle

of one who passed along the roadway. Instinctively she hushed her grief, holding the breath that would come only in gasps. The whistler drew nearer, and for the time the question whether he was turning into the wood became one of paramount importance. For fully a minute the decision hung in the balance; then there was a perceptible diminution of sound. The whistler had passed on.

The spell of the girl's grief, however, was broken. She unclasped her arms from the tree and rose slowly to her feet. Then she stood long in the darkness, fighting a battle with pain.

"There no use holdin' your head down like a sick chicken, Magnolia Boyd," she said at last. "You tell him to go, and you ain't goin' stand clear across his track to stop him."

The voice was hard, and the tone defiant. Unconsciously, in her fight with pain the girl had seized the weapon of the novice. The courage that turns against sorrow a tender patience does not come with the first fight.

The girl set her face toward the outskirts of the wood. She walked slowly, but more than once she came into sharp contact with some legitimate inhabitant of that belt of forest. Were her eyes tear blinded that they stood her in so little stead?

The sobs that had come at longer and longer intervals had ceased altogether now. As she stepped out into the roadway the girl dashed away the last of the tears, and lifted up her face to the cool night. It was hot with tears, and she let the damp breeze play upon it till it grew white and still and cool again.

There was no fear that any should pry into its secrets. The road was dark, until she came to the lights of the cabins that had once formed the quarters of a plantation where there had been many slaves. She passed the first half dozen houses and came to one standing

back in a garden patch. The door of this cabin was open, the brightness from the fire showing out in the darkness.

Until she reached that lighted space the girl's feet had lagged heavily. Now all trace of weariness vanished. With a quick spring she mounted the rickety steps and stood within the room. Her heart gave a sharp throb of pain. A few more days and these home-comings would be at an end, for—Gloss would be gone, and Gloss made home.

"How long have you been back, Gloss?"

For a minute there was no answer. The young man kneeling upon the hearth reached forth his hand and took a stick of wood. He stopped to bestow it carefully in the exact spot among the blazing pine knots where its ignition would be most speedily accomplished. Then he rose and turned toward the door.

"Long enough to git the fire kindled up," he said. "Thought I'd cotched ye nappin'. If we're goin' to the weddin' we sho'ly got to stir lively."

"I don't know as it's worth while goin'," she began, and then broke off abruptly. "Do you want to go?" she asked, in a changed tone.

For answer he came over to her, put both his hands on her shoulders, and turned her face to the firelight.

"Nolie, you ain't told me true. You done gone and deceived me."

His eyes were looking into hers. At the first words the girl's fell before them. Then they were lifted to flash defiance at him.

"You've done got to shew where I told you a story," she said.

His lips smiled at her, but the smile passed no further than their corners. Over the rest of the young man's face had fallen a shadow.

"I'm sure takin' a mighty heap on myself, plannin' to go such a great ways," he said slowly. "I ain't feelin'

easy. Nolie, if you only jest whisper 'Stop,' I'll give it all up. It's dreffful poor work fotchin' learnin' from afar and leavin' love to die at home."

"What's goin' to make it die?" she asked, with another flash at him.

"It ain't goin' to die out o' my heart," he said earnestly. He had a trick of taking things earnestly—too earnestly, seeing that he lived in a world where the art of shaking off burdens is a valuable one to learn. "I'd like mighty well to go to that school," he added. "I'd like mighty well to raise myself, and reach a helpin' hand down to they-uns below, but I sure ain't prepared to leave you sad and lonesome."

She laughed—a laugh light as a child's.

"Do I look sad?" she asked. "I'll be proud as a peacock when I know for certain you done got to that school."

The pressure of his hands upon her shoulders grew a little heavier. He was not altogether deceived by her words. He was still looking into her eyes.

Standing thus, with the firelight playing upon the one face, and the shadows falling about the other, it was hard to believe them brother and sister. They made a good study in contrasts. The girl showed as little of the black blood that was in her as her brother did of the white strain that mingled with his own. He was unmistakably a black man, a type of his race. If one excepted the eyes, and a certain mobility of feature not to be seen in every negro countenance, he might fairly have represented the nine hundred and ninety out of every thousand of his people to be met with in the Southern States of America.

The wistful longing in his eyes told another tale. Looking into them one thought no longer of the nine hundred and ninety, but gazed down into the soul of the one man, recognizing there an individuality that struggled for growth. Nevertheless, since there were few people

who had time to look into those eyes, the boy—for he seemed little more—would have been passed over in a crowd, classified broadly as one of "the niggers."

His sister would have been likely to meet with an opposite fate. She was not one of a crowd—never would be. For her the danger was not that of being overlooked, but rather of being looked upon too curiously. Even now, people did not pass that white, delicate face, with its setting of pale gold hair, and not turn to look at it. She was a mere slip of a girl, conspicuously immature, but there was a grace in her bearing in strong contrast with the clumsy carriage of the young man. For a full minute she had been standing perfectly still, her eyes looking into his. Now, with one of her erratic movements, she put up her two hands and removed his from her shoulders.

"We'll go to the weddin'," she said.

And they went, after hastily discussing their supper of tea and corn-bread and syrup.

There was no attempt at setting a table, possibly because there was no table to set. Within that cabin was nothing that was not absolutely necessary, and life can be supported without a table.

The brother and sister ate their tea in careless fashion before the cabin fire, with feet stretched out to the blaze. The region being Florida, and the season winter, there was just enough cold in the air to make the warmth of the fire attractive. To any but the boy and girl sitting before it that fire might have appeared the only thing that could by any excuse lay claim to attractiveness in the habitation. The cabin was primitive to absolute rudeness, relieved from squalor only by its extreme cleanliness. Its bareness, however, had never troubled the girl. Why should it? The place did not lack the essentials of happiness. Many of the negro cabins around were resplendent with store-bought furniture. The fact made little impression on Magnolia Boyd. Her neighbours were

welcome to their furniture. She had Gloss, and having him, she had all things.

It was possibly a narrow content, this satisfaction with what might have been improved, but for the girl there was the excuse that she had never known better surroundings. Her brother, by reason of his two years' seniority, could recall dim memories of luxuries in the way of household goods bestowed in a three-roomed dwelling that to his imagination assumed wonderful proportions. Those were the days whereunto pertained a face white and pretty like that of his sister Magnolia. The days had had a limit. They passed, and with them the home to which they belonged. There had succeeded an interval of loneliness, beginning with the occasion on which the young mother was laid in the ground. It was an interval in which the baby Gloss, with a true chivalrous instinct, placed himself between the still smaller baby Magnolia and the blows or cold neglect of a world too full of babies to stand on any ceremony of tenderness with these two. At the end of it came a black mammy and the log hut of to-day.

The father—well, he was dead now. When, in a more Northern State, he married a respectable mulatto girl, he was a fine specimen of a negro—young, tall, erect, as fearless as he was proud. The "no account" tendencies had developed later, when his young wife was buried out of his sight. Apparently all his energies were buried with her. He began to drift, and as the necessary direction of drifting is downward, he reached his level. It was at the bottom. As a matter of course his children reached it with him.

The boy stepped into the breach as soon as he was old enough to step at all. His thick-set figure was seen in the cotton row when he was at such an age that his presence there spoke much for his capability. While other pickaninnies of his years went back and forth through the fields "toting water," he

picked cotton with his elders, taking his share of work uncomplainingly, and going home with tired, swift feet when the lengthening shadows closed the long summer working day, bent on nothing so much as assuring himself that "none of dem niggers hadn't been grievin' Magnolia." In his babyhood Gloss had established himself Magnolia's protector. He was her protector still—when she wanted one, which was not often. It would need to be a sharp war of words in which the girl could not hold her own now.

It was the thought of his sister that caused the young man to hesitate still on the brink of the plunge he had all but decided to take. Magnolia was not unobservant of the inquiring gaze he turned upon her more than once during the progress of the meal. It brought a little, defiant curve to her lips. Did he think she was going to betray herself, to let him know what it had cost her to persuade him to the putting into action of his long-cherished scheme of going to a distant school and working his way up to the knowledge he craved? If he did, he was mistaken.

Sorrow seemed as far from the girl at the moment as silence. Her tongue even beguiled a laugh from the lips of her brother. She regarded that laugh on the present occasion as a triumph.

Yet, when the two started for the wedding frolic, it was Magnolia who came last out of the cabin, and who for a moment allowed her eyes to travel wistfully round the primitive habitation. Uncle Pete was right. They had surely had good times within its walls—she and Gloss. The years since the black mammy went the way of all flesh, and Gloss undertook first of all to transform the dirty, forlorn hut into a place of cleanliness, and then to keep it as a home over his own and his sister's head, had been to her the best of her life. And now—Gloss was going away. She shut the door with an emphatic bang, and plunged into the darkness.

## CHAPTER II.

A WEDDING by torchlight, with the whole dusky population of the neighbourhood as witness, and the stars twinkling in chuckling fashion overhead, as in manifest appreciation of the event, is not the best of scenes in which to hug despair to the bosom. Long before Magnolia and her brother had traversed the mile of road that lay between their cabin and the plantation where the wedding was to be solemnized, they had auricular demonstration that the festivities had begun. This was further proved by the absence of company along the way. All the world was already on the spot. In spite of herself, Magnolia's feet moved more swiftly. There is contagion in mirth, and mirth reigned supreme in the fire and torch lighted space where the negro neighbours of the bride and groom were already congregated.

Surrounded by an outer wall of darkness, the scene of the festivities was picturesque enough to bid defiance to the commonplace. A hundred yards from the cabin where the expectant bride awaited in stately grandeur the coming of the bridegroom and the important hour, a generous pile of brushwood had been gathered for the nuptial bonfire. At the moment when Gloss and his sister appeared it was burning valiantly, casting weird lights and shadows on the dark faces and gala attire of the plantation belles, and throwing into relief the broad grins and self-important bearing of the doughty swains. Round-eyed, red-lipped pickaninnies danced round the flame, shrieking with delight as it gained headway and threatened to catch some more venturesome one of their number in its too ardent embrace. Opposite the dwelling, and in its immediate vicinity, four large pine-knot torches, fastened to convenient posts, threw light upon

the doorway through which relays of visitors were entering.

Catching the spirit of the occasion, Magnolia's step grew buoyant. Her eyes reflected the glint of the firelight even as she crossed the outermost rim of light, that dim region belonging neither to the darkness without nor the brightness within, which was a fit antechamber to this outdoor hall of ceremony. More than one pair of sharp organs of vision descried the boy and girl as they advanced.

"Fetchin' Gloss to de weddin', is ye, Magnolia?" called out a fat, motherly negro woman. "You'se sho'ly wise. Dar ain't gwine be no long patience wanted 'fore dar a weddin' up in Hebron, and Gloss he fixin' a fire 'fore his door. Ah me!"

The chuckle with which the words ended had a world of good nature in it.

Not so the voice that took up the discourse. It belonged to a swarthy maiden of wonderful proportions and more wonderful attire, whose claims to beauty were well understood by the coloured community.

"Lor, Aunt Kissy, you sho'ly don' know nothin'," she ejaculated sharply. "I done made certain Magnoly warn't goin' show her face. I cert'nly seed her this afternoon wid her head hangin' down like she feel mighty bad, an' I say, 'She sho' feel awful bad; she look like she dreffful, doleful jealous. Her heart cert'nly down lower dan her knees.'"

Magnolia felt rather than saw the inquiring look her brother turned upon her, and a wave of colour came to her cheeks. A moment later a ripple of mirth played about the well-curved lips.

"That's cert'nly true, Portia Bowdon," she said, with slow, deliberate utterance, and a laughing glance round the company. "There more'n enough to grieve me. I done been doin' a little figgerin', and it send my heart 'way down lower'n my knees. Ah, me! Look at it yourselves."

For a moment the strong white hands were stretched out argumentatively, as Magnolia appealed to the crowd.

"There girls enough," continued the speaker, "at the rate they's gettin' married, to last for years, and it not goin' be my turn till I'se an ole woman. There's only one way, and I natchelly can't take it. I warn't raised that away. I can't step in ahead of my elders. It not manners. I sure got to wait."

She turned away with a laugh on her lips, a laugh that must have been contagious, for it found echo all through the company, and ran back and forth throughout the fire-lighted space, dying away and starting again with a disjointed crackle of mirth.

It was still exploding in distant regions when Magnolia passed up the cabin steps, her eyes sparkling, her head a little more erect than usual. Her heart lower than her knees! They should never say it again. She turned her laughing eyes full on Gloss as she entered the cabin. His face had grown grave. What did that Portia Bowdon mean by disturbing him afresh? Well, it was the last time she should have occasion for such words.

Of a certainty the bride, sitting in solemn grandeur in her wedding finery within the dwelling, had no cause to suspect sadness on the part of the girl. The dignified silence hitherto prevailing was broken by a ripple of chatter as Magnolia entered, and the hour of ceremonious waiting before the bridegroom appeared was more than once robbed of its stately dignity by an outbreak of mirth caused by one of the girl's sallies. It was Magnolia who at last announced the coming of the fortunate groom, and who, amidst a breathless thrill of excitement, pinned on the bride's veil, giving it a graceful droop that brought a smile of content to that young woman's face.

And when the supreme moment came, and in view of the assembled crowd the dark-faced, white-gowned

maiden took up her position upon the topmost of the cabin steps, full in the glare of the blazing torches, and the important-looking groom assumed a becoming attitude by her side, it was Magnolia who stood nearest to the happy couple, and who cast upon the uplifted faces of curious humanity one little step below her a look that was a challenge to laughter. It changed to preternatural gravity at the instant when the broad-built, ebony-visaged pastor of that particular flock lifted up his hand to enjoin silence, and in imposing tones began the ceremony which made the pair man and wife.

The bonfire, many times replenished, blazed and crackled in the background, unheeded now even by the pickaninnies who had been its most ardent admirers. Every wide-eyed, black-faced youngster was agape at the central scene, over which the flaming torches presided, and upon which the stars—their chuckle changed to a benediction—looked down benignantly.

And Magnolia stood in the central group, her heart beating more quickly than usual, her sensations those of neither pleasure nor pain, but a curious mingling of both. The spell of that night wedding was on her.

Her heart lower than her knees? Gloss looked at her, and shook his head. She was a child still, this sister whom he loved with all the strength of his clumsy being, but whom he did not quite understand. She was light of heart, and would be comforted. If he did not think so, he would even now change his plans.

The young man was honest in his thought. He was not intentionally deceiving himself. Of a surety, if he had read aright the girl's attitude, he would have consigned his aspirations to the innermost recesses of his own heart and stayed where he was. It would have cost him something. Nay, it would have cost him everything. To crush down the first aspirations of youth is a species of murder hard to commit. And this young coloured man had aspirations, and they were strong.

Why not? He was a boy, at the age when boys are expected to have aspirations—white boys. But he was not white, and just here came in the incongruity. Nevertheless he cherished aspirations. Ambitions to be head of a football team, to be a leader of sports among his companions, or even to obtain academic honours, did not disturb him. What he did aspire to was to help his people up.

Ignorant black niggers? Even so. They were black enough, and ignorant enough, but they were his people notwithstanding. Somewhere down in his inner consciousness was a thought that there were capabilities in them for higher things, a half-developed feeling of nationality, a reaching after something as a people.

Black and ignorant! For years now the words had run in and out among his thoughts, weaving a strand of noble purpose through and about the mere mechanical toil that filled his days. The blackness could not be helped. Why should it? It was outside the responsibility of any but the fashioner of black and white alike. But the ignorance? It was that which troubled him. He made no attempt to deny that ignorance. Possibly he acknowledged it almost too fully, giving it undue prominence, and letting it hide for him qualities as conspicuous as those which he deplored, qualities that, coming on the other side of the argument, should have had a counterbalancing effect.

With an almost exaggerated humility he acknowledged his own low condition and that of his people. But from out the gulf of degradation and ignorance he dared to look toward honour and worth, and had the audacity to dream of an uplifting for his race which should embrace all things. Unlike many youthful reformers, he admitted that the work must begin at the bottom. For him this meant learning with a child's humility the simplest things, and working with his hands while he learned. He was ready for the task. He was burning to attempt

it. But if it meant for Magnolia, his little white sister, the baby of his earlier days of struggle, a sorrow that would refuse to lift, he would remain in the depths.

He watched her closely to-night. And in the end he shook his head. How could he understand that which she was determined he should not know?

Even when he stood with the rest of the company around the supper table, where turkey and cake and pie were disappearing from the dishes with alarming rapidity, and the discussion of his own plans came up, Gloss could see no sign of faltering in Magnolia.

"Sho', Gloss, we'se been here tell you done made up your mind to go to dat school," said the old pastor impressively. "Boy, you doin' a mighty foolish thing—you cert'nly is. What you want wid more larnin' dan you got? Can't you read good?"

A slow smile came to the young man's face.

"That's jest it, Uncle Shadrach," he said. "I read enough to make me know I don't know nothin'. It's readin' stirs a man up and shews him what heaps he got to learn."

"Heaps!" said the old man contemptuously. "What dem heaps to do wid you? De cotton field your place. Dat good 'nuff fer you. How much I eber know of dem heaps? I larn to pick cotton when I'se a pickaninny. Dat larnin' 'nuff for me. Is I any de wuss for not knowin' dem heaps? Bless de boy, he's larnin'-struck! Dar lots o' niggers got dat complaint, and it a mighty onruly complaint to ketch."

"You never had it, Uncle Shadrach, did you?" interposed Magnolia.

Her lips were set in grave lines, but there was a dancing light in her eyes that brought a grin to more than one pair of lips in the company.

"Me, chile!" ejaculated Uncle Shadrach, turning to her aghast. "Young ooman, Uncle Shadrach wasn't neber no more of a fool dan he is to-day."

"That's true, Uncle Shadrach," said the girl, in slow, meditative tones. "That sho'ly true."

The old man looked at her sharply, and a loud laugh broke out at the far end of the table.

"Dat ain't no criterion to go by," interposed Uncle Pete. "You and me, Uncle Shadrach, we lib in de ole times. Dese times is de new. Look at de white folk. Dey goes ahead. Dere a long way space betwixt de nigger and de white man. De white man hab de start years and years ago. But de white man go walkin' right along wid long steps eber since. Dat right. He sho' want to advance. De nigger no 'casion to blame him. But if de nigger stan' still, de space betwixt him and de white man grow bigger ebery day. Dat not right. Dat determental to de nigger half of de sitevation. De nigger he got to stir. He got to step out. Dat Gloss got a head-piece what worth somethin'. He understand."

"He nothin' but larnin'-struck," repeated Uncle Shadrach, his voice gathering volume with his wrath. It went hard with Uncle Shadrach when he found himself getting the worst of an argument. "His larnin' ain't gwine help him pick cotton," he added. "Dat Gloss run an' run, and plunge head foremost in de creek 'fore he know whar he goin'. He study books. Bless de boy! He better study he constituency. Now, I tell you. He ain't got de constituency for dat thing he aimin' at doin'. It take a mighty strong constituency to labour wid de hands an' larn at de same time. De nigger what try it when he lack de constituency is gwine find himself a dead nigger in de end. Dat Gloss do well nuff here on de plantation. But now you let me tell you. He not able to stan' no great strain. He turn into a sick nigger if he try it. Now you see."

It was then that the laugh for a minute left Magnolia's eyes. She turned them first upon her brother and then upon the speaker. There was wrath in them. Gloss

not strong—not able to stand the strain he proposed! Her lips opened to speak, but before a sound escaped them Uncle Pete took up the word.

"You sho' better shet your mouth, Uncle Shadrach," he said with a chuckle. "Ain't you neber heared tell dar meat for de mind as well as for de body? You and me miss a heap o' dat sort o' victuals, Uncle Shadrach. We cert'nly stout 'nuff in de body, but we mighty lean in de mind. We ole niggers got to stan' aside an' let de giants what nourishes de mind and de body, both, hab a chance."

The laugh was on the side of Uncle Pete, and if there were some who condemned while they envied the young man's ambitious undertaking, there were many who envied and admired.

Not a word of it all was lost on Magnolia. She laughed and jested to the end, her eyes shining, and her cheeks tinged with a delicate colour that caused more than one dusky swain to turn his gaze upon her more frequently than occasion absolutely demanded. Gloss went home reassured. She would miss him, but when he was gone she would be comforted. And in the outcome it would be better for both. She was capable of higher things than these, and his good would be hers also.

The attitude the girl had assumed did not change when, torch and nuptial fire having burned themselves into darkness, the merry crowd bade a ceremonious adieu to the bridal pair, and straggled homeward, dropping away by twos and threes into the darkness as the respective cabins were reached. The laughter was still on her lips when she stood again in the little old hut that would be home but a few days longer, and turned with her hand on the door of the lean-to appropriated to her own especial use.

"I'm sho'ly glad we went," she said. "Lots of them niggers would mighty like to stan' in your shoes, Gloss."

Her eyes met those of her brother and did not flinch.

That steady gaze reassured him more than all that had gone before.

And if those same eyes stared in wide-open wakefulness into the darkness long after the sound of the young man's footsteps in the outer room had ceased and all the world of the little hamlet of Hebron was asleep, it was a thing immaterial. They might do as they liked now. Unfriendly critics were safely employed in dreaming of weddings, and torches, and future conquests. Only Magnolia was awake, and her eyes were shining still.

"He's goin'," she whispered into the darkness. "He's goin', sure."

And this time, though her breath came fast, there was an exultant throb at her heart.

Gloss was going—going away to secure the learning he had always craved for, going to make himself fit to be a leader among his people. She had seen the gleam of envy in more than one pair of eyes to-night, and that envy had reacted on her thought. The loss had for the moment stepped behind the gain. It would come to the front later. But now she was realizing that Gloss—her Gloss—was about to do that which many another would have liked to attempt had he not lacked the courage. For the time pride overcame sorrow.

"He's goin', sure," she said, and lay and stared into the darkness, and fell asleep at last when the night was old.

The morrow was Sunday, and the last day Gloss would spend in Hebron. On this day also the young man looked in vain for sign of wavering on the part of his sister. There was a wistfulness in his bearing toward her that would of itself have deterred her from showing her grief. Her gaiety had departed, but a determined cheerfulness had taken its place. It hid her heart as effectually as mirth would have done.

They were both restless to-day, else they would not have been found at noon at the edge of the clearing where

the negro church stood. A disinclination to enter had kept them wandering about the strip of low-lying forest land till the exercises of the morning had been long under way. Later on they drew near to the broad, unpainted building, and listened to Uncle Shadrach's voice as it rose and fell. The trees of the forest stretched their arms above them, and a grey wintry sky shut them in.

To Gloss it seemed as if all the Sundays of the past were gathered here in the forest around him to-day. He saw all that was grotesque and all that was pathetic in them. They were the chief factor in the influences that had formed within him the intense desire to go away. A deep religious feeling had made this side of negro life the one that appealed most forcibly to the young man. It was here that he felt most keenly the lack of discipline and knowledge. Uncle Shadrach's peculiar rendering of Scripture facts and precepts had long ago brought smiles to the lips of the boy and girl whose eager reading of everything that came in their way had resulted in a little too much knowledge to accept all the old man's premises. But while Magnolia had laughed and forgotten, Gloss had let the laughter die away in a sigh. The weekly display of excitement, that often amounted to frenzy, and that had little or no after influence on the lives of the actors therein, had first puzzled and then troubled him. He was not willing to accept as a necessity the failings of his race. Why should failings be a necessity to the black man any more than to the white man? He was only an untaught negro, but he was loyally in earnest in his desire for the advancement, not so much of the one negro, Gloss Boyd, as of the whole coloured race. And because the religious side of the question touched most nearly his own heart, it was in that direction he most earnestly craved improvement. To-day, as he stood under the trees, he was going again over the arguments that had decided him to seek to turn his aspirations into efforts.

"We're sho'ly low-down, ign'rant niggers, but can't we learn—can't we climb up?"

The words broke a long silence. The face of the speaker, almost grotesque in its earnestness, was turned toward the church.

Magnolia's lips, which in the interval of silence had grown hard and set, softened into a smile. She laid her hand on her brother's arm, with a gesture half dissent, half sympathy.

"*You* could," she said, " but they-uns—" She broke off with a little laugh. "I ain't sure they want to learn," she added. "They-uns is sho'ly well satisfied with theyselves."

His brow contracted.

"Satisfied! That's jest it," he said. "They don't know enough to be anything *but* satisfied."

By which remark the young man stamped himself as something of a philosopher. He had come to the knowledge that content with one's self is not the most infallible sign of progress. There have been nations that have had less intuition.

"Somebody's gittin' happy," remarked Magnolia, when for a full minute silence had fallen between them.

In sound it was not altogether suggestive of happiness—that cry, half wail, half shout, which suddenly broke upon the Sunday stillness of the forest. Yet doubtless the girl was right. The cry was accompanied and followed by the thump of rapidly moving feet, as of one or more engaged in the exercise of dancing.

Magnolia took a dozen steps forward. The change of position brought her in a line with a window, affording her a view of the interior of the church. It disclosed to her a scene familiar enough, yet once again, as often before, that scene brought a smile to her lips.

She saw a broad aisle running round the railed-in space where Uncle Shadrach had his seat of honour, supported in his dignity by the old men of his flock—men

with shoulders a trifle bent, and faces upon which the skin had dried and hardened to the consistency of leather. Into this aisle a middle-aged negress in red bandana had advanced, with the intent of making known to the assembled company her "determination" to continue steadfast in life and purpose.

"I'm standin'! I'm standin'! I'm sho'ly standin' for de truf."

The rising inflection upon the second word in each ejaculation gave to the statement a weird impressiveness. As she proceeded, the speaker's enthusiasm merged into excitement. Her voice gathered to itself shrillness. Her phrases came fast. Then, suddenly, language found itself inadequate to the task required of it. Zeal outran the supply of words, while at the same time expression became a necessity, a pressing need that must be met. Coherent language could not meet it. Hence the cry which had drawn Magnolia to the window.

The cry was repeated. A frenzy of excitement had taken possession of the negress. It affected not simply the organs of articulation, but also every nerve centre of her being, gaining control of brain and muscle till the whole body moved in sympathy with the dominating principle.

Her reiterated statement of the fact notwithstanding, the speaker's standing was anything but stable at the present crisis. Her swiftly moving feet executed a series of stirring leaps that left them for but brief intervals upon the floor. Her hands, not to be behind in energetic action, beat upon breast and knees in a frenzy of joy, as she gave utterance to ejaculations and cries. Solemn-visaged Uncle Shadrach came in for a manifestation of her religious fervour when she suddenly grasped the old man's hand and shook it with an energy that must surely have tried the temper of its sinews. So far from wearing out her zeal, these exhibitions of it only quickened it into more fervid heat. The negress turned upon the

older brethren and sisters of the congregation, greeting them with the same vigorous handshake.

A minute more and the excitement had spread. A negro rose and began to pray. An aged negress in snow-white bandana, started a tune. Another woman was on her feet, striking her breast, waving her hands above her head, shouting and testifying to her steadfastness in the religious life. The church was in a tumult. The first speaker collapsed and fell back upon the floor. Another took her place.

"They're sho'ly gittin' happy," said Magnolia, looking in upon the scene from her vantage point beyond the window.

"They ain't one mite better for doin' that away," replied her brother sadly. "They-all mean it right, but it ain't what religion should be. If they-all had somebody to teach them the real way, somebody of their own colour, they might learn that standin' for the Lord's standin' agin sin—they own sin. It's mighty easy standin' agin some other nigger's sin, and mighty hard standin' agin your own. They-all don't understand that religion's a thing you've got to live every day, and live it hard. It ain't *that.*"

"That" was another screech, witness to the strength of lung of some one or other of the half dozen excited men and women who were taking an active part in the proceedings. As it sounded in his ears there came to the eyes of Gloss Boyd a light earnest and tender. He moved a few steps forward, and stood by his sister's side, looking in at the window. A minute, or perhaps two, passed. He laid his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I'll go," he said, and the words had in them the ring of a vow. "And when I've made myself fit, I'll come back. It may be that then they'll listen to me and learn. They sho'ly missin' the way."

## CHAPTER III.

THE next morning he went—in style that spoke much for the earnestness of his purpose. Four hundred miles away was the school the lad sought. He went afoot, carrying his bundle of clothing and a portentous-looking parcel which contained nothing more formidable than some big loaves of corn bread made by Magnolia expressly for the journey.

"That learnin's worth workin' for, and walkin' for too," he said.

And he put his two hands on Magnolia's shoulders, looked into her eyes long and earnestly, bent and kissed the face that quivered a little at this last moment, and turned and was gone. That was out upon the highway, far beyond the hamlet of Hebron. Magnolia had refused to part with him at the cabin door.

"I'll set you on your way a bit," she said. "The partin's goin' to come soon enough."

It came when the day was far advanced, and he insisted on Magnolia's turning back.

She uttered no word of sorrow or protest, but stood and watched him until upon the long stretch of road his figure grew indistinct, and later a depression hid him from her sight.

"He's done gone!" she said, and stood staring into the blankness where his form had last been seen.

"He's done gone!"

Many minutes had passed since she spoke the words before—how many the girl could not have told. Her eyes had a stony stare in them.

"He's done gone," she repeated. "And if it don't turn out for good—to him—I shall sho'ly die."

She turned her face toward Hebron, plodding slowly

along the road, and until Uncle Pete's cabin came in sight she did not know whether she was one mile or six from her destination.

As for Gloss, his irresolution had vanished in the interval when he stood looking in at the window of the negro church. His heart was very tender toward Magnolia, the baby sister from whom he had never before been separated, but he had decided that there lay a duty before him. His thoughts were not rose coloured as he went to meet it. He fully understood that for many years its privations would outnumber its privileges. In the days of the past—they had become the old days now—he and Magnolia had never lacked food, and the pleasures of life came naturally with the associations of the hamlet. The future would mean more of struggle than he had yet known. The wearing apparel in his bundle, and a couple of dollars in his pocket, were his sole possessions. With them, together with Magnolia's supply of corn bread, he was going out to secure an education. And it lay four hundred miles away. He could have taken more money if he had been willing to leave the girl with less. This he had stubbornly refused to do.

"There ten dollars left," he said, as he separated the two from their fellows. "When cotton pickin' comes round agin you'll earn more. And Uncle Pete'll see you don't take no harm till then. But I sho'ly ain't goin' leave you with less'n that."

He was thinking of Magnolia now, as he walked rapidly on into the unknown. It troubled him that he must leave her alone. But there was always Uncle Pete. The old negro would make a watchful guardian.

The girl would be a woman before he returned. His heart gave a throb of pain at the thought. Holidays and home came in the lives of most ambitious students. Gloss knew such things were not for him. He could not twice in the years his education would take up afford the time to walk four hundred miles. The vacations

must supply funds to meet expenses that could hardly be avoided in the school days.

His farewell when he put his arms on his sister's shoulders and looked into her face had been a farewell to the child and the girl. It hurt him to know that he must miss the remaining years of her girlhood. Yet he did not regret the step he had taken. He walked steadily on with eyes that saw plainly the struggle before him. He was looking to the further side of those years of effort, and he thought he saw there the power to do something to uplift the men and women of his race.

"Good-evenin', sah. How are you, sah?"

The speaker must have had good eyes, for the "evenin' " was far enough advanced to make the very road indistinct as the feet of Gloss Boyd passed over it. He had pushed on as long as he could see. Time was a factor that counted now. As the voice hailed him from the doorway of an outbuilding, he stopped.

"Good-evenin', sah," he returned. "I'm tol'rable well. How are you, sah?"

"I'm tol'rable well. How's your folks?"

"They're well."

"Goin' a heap furder, sah?"

The ceremonious preamble was approaching more interesting matters. The interlocutor advanced into the road.

"Yes," returned Gloss, with the suspicion of a smile. "This journey, sah, ain't goin' be less'n four hundred miles."

"Four hundred miles! How you gwine git dar?"

"These feet done got to take me," said Gloss.

The other drew nearer, peering into the speaker's face.

"You plannin' to foot it?"

"I *am* footin' it," replied the young man. "I got it sized up this way. I got to go, and it sho'ly take a mighty heap o' money to go that far in the cars."

"That's right," replied the stranger. "You needn't to go near dem cars less'n you got de money. What de name of de place you gwine to, sah?"

"Tuskadela."

The negro shook his head.

"I disremember if I ever heared tell of it," he said. "Your relatives livin' dar, sah?"

"No," repled Gloss, who was busy revolving the question whether he should ask this stranger to give him shelter for the night. "I'm goin' there to school."

"You got good courage, sho', to go such a great ways," replied the other. "Whar be your home?"

"In Hebron. I started to-day."

"Come in, chile. You sho'ly not able to go no furder in dis darkness."

Both the men turned toward the cabin door, where an old negress, bent, and shrivelled, and thin, stood beckoning vigorously with her hand.

"Brung dat chile in, Zekel," she said emphatically. "Dis no time to stan' confabulatin' in de middle ob nowhar."

Thus admonished, the two entered the cabin. The old woman motioned Gloss to a seat.

"Set you down, honey," she said. "*I* knows you'se both futsore an' weary, a-pressin' dem roads wid your two feet since mornin'. *I* knows how fur 'tis to Hebron. Lor, chile, I'se travelled, I has."

"Not as fur as he's gwine, mammy," interposed Zekel. "You eber hear tell o' Tuskadela?"

She shook her head.

"No, I ain't neber heared o' dat place," she responded. "You'se gwine dar to school, is you, honey? Lor, I knows. I heared when you tell Zekel. He my chile. I'm old—de oldest ole mother round dis away, but I got good hearin'. How you gwine pay for dat school when you sho's runned too short ob money to git toted on de cars? Dat what I wantin' to know, honey?"

"I'm reckonin' to pay by my work," said the young man proudly. "That school's managed this away. If a man able to pay, he study all day as much as he like. If he got no money, he work all day and earn it, and do the studyin' at night. I'm aimin' to work in the days to pay my board, and study in the evenin's."

"Mercy, chile, you got good courage," said the old woman. "You cert'nly has. What you want to larn so mighty bad?"

"Everything," said Gloss. "It's not what's in books only that they each in that school. It everything you do. It how to grow more cotton on your land, and to build yourself a better house. We niggers don't know how to do the best. We all along satisfied with the wust."

The old woman raised both hands impressively.

"Lor, chile," she said, "you done got you head full ob dreffful upsettin' notions. What you want to grow more cotton for? It not fill you mouth no fuller. You mortgage your crop to de white man, honey, and he give you de rations. Dat all you git anyways. He fill you mouth. It not hold no more if you grows a heap o' cotton bigger dan de cabin. De white man give you rations jes' de same. He fix it so it jes' come out even. It no matter how much cotton you raise, you not make more dan you eat. I a ole-time slave nigger, but I knows somethin', honey."

"But if we niggers learn to grow more cotton and corn and all we want on the land, we not need mortgage the crop," said Gloss earnestly. "It there we fail. Why can't we work for ourselves instead of for the white man?"

Zekel burst into a loud laugh.

"Boy, you'se mighty young," he said, "you sho'ly is. How we gwine start widout de white man's money? We wants money. Whar it comin' from? Boy, de white man got it; de nigger got nothin'. De nigger jes' forced

to mortgage his crop and his work and his wife and his chillen. De white man make money and de nigger push him up de hill. Boy, it allus so. Don' you know? 'Naught's a naught, and figger's a figger, all for de white man, and none for de nigger.' "

Gloss shook his head.

"The nigger got to stir. He got to take long steps," he said earnestly. "It goin' be a mighty hard thing to do. That why the nigger not set about it. It drefful hard. But he sure got to do it or be stomped down under the white man's foot. He *able* to do it."

"Chile, you make de future ter'ble painful for de nigger," said the old woman, slowly and emphatically. "De nigger he got to git free ob de white man. De white man hab all de money, an' all de land, an' all de eberything. De nigger he hab nothin' but de pain, and de work, and de burden. It dis away, honey. De way you puts it, de nigger he got to race wid de white man, and de white man hab de big long stretch ob a start till he 'way ahead, and he hab de long legs, and de go-aheadness all inside him. De nigger hab de behindness and de hab-nothingness, and dey force him to take ter'ble short steps, and he come creepin' along. When he catch up, honey?"

"He got the strength in his arms and legs," said Gloss. "The nigger race able to work, mammy. They sho'ly am. And work's a power in this land. If the nigger work, and learn to work well, he win yet."

"He win when de judgment day come, honey," said the old woman impressively—"not afore."

"Dis chile wait for dat day," said Zekel. "He not start too soon. Dat race too painful for him."

Gloss spent the night in the cabin with his new acquaintances. He refused to partake of their hospitality in any other form.

"I got the whole thing mapped out to earn all I has,"

he said. "I not meanin' to git my education out of nobody, only out of my own legs and arms. They mighty well able to do it. I got plenty of victuals."

And he ate his corn bread in contentment, and planned his route for the morrow; then slept the sleep of the weary traveller until the day dawned.

One day was like another, except that the country grew strange to him as he proceeded, and that he was not always fortunate in finding hospitality at the end of the tramp. Once or twice he crept into some outbuilding after its owner was asleep, and left it betimes in the morning. The nights were cold and damp, and he hesitated to sleep under the open sky.

He was getting on. Magnolia's store of bread was growing lighter, and the number of miles that lay between him and his destination slowly lessening. Hitherto weather and circumstances had been propitious.

His rough lodgings had told somewhat upon his appearance, as had the long, solitary tramps upon his spirits. He was far away from home, and the world felt strange. More than ever before, now that the little hamlet where he knew everybody and was known by everybody was left behind, and he found himself called upon to face the larger world, he realized that he belonged to a despised people. If that had been all, he could have borne it with equanimity, for he was of a humble disposition. But the knowledge that there was reason for the contempt, that in what seemed to him—erroneously perhaps—almost every essential respect he was inferior to the white men with whom he came in contact, touched the sensitive side of his nature and made him timid and self-distrustful. It did not for one moment shake his determination to go on, to struggle and work until the disparity between himself and the white men with whom he now for the first time consciously measured himself grew less. It rather deepened his resolution never to rest till he could lift up his head and look the world in the face,

not arrogantly, but modestly and hopefully, and with self-respect.

His was not a bold nature, either morally or physically. His sister Magnolia would have met the world with less of fear, though she was his inferior in years and wisdom. But she was endowed with that which he did not possess—a measure of the lightheartedness of her race, that gift which is surely heaven's compensation to a people who have perhaps, up to the present day, had a little less to thank either heaven or earth for than have the majority of civilized mankind. The boy, on the other hand, had caught and imprisoned in his being the pathos of his race, the undercurrent of sadness hidden in the average negro by his rollicking fun and frolic, but cropping up everywhere among these people as a whole. He knew what it was to fear. The bondage of the spirit—which has survived that of the body—was not yet fully removed from him.

On this day he passed, without knowing it, the boundaries of another county. Had he been aware of the fact he would but have rejoiced, since it made one less between himself and Tuskadela. It yet lacked several hours of noon when he came to the outskirts of a small town. Already it had struck him as peculiar that for an hour or more the few travellers upon the highway had been without exception white men. He had looked about him for the cabin of a negro, hitherto a sufficiently common object. It was not to be found. He wondered, and passed on. The representatives of his people must be few hereabouts, he thought.

Coming to a railroad crossing he found himself at the entrance to the station. It was an insignificant place, but inasmuch as Hebron was not on a line of travel, a railway station was to him still a novelty. He allowed his feet to lag, and then to come to a stand. A train had just arrived, and there was a modicum of stir and bustle. For a minute or two it engrossed his attention. Then

it was forgotten. He did not know that on the cars the gates were being swung to, and that the locomotive had begun to move. His eyes were fixed upon a notice occupying a conspicuous position in the station. Looking at it he had forgotten his surroundings, forgotten even himself.

"Mr. Nigger, mind you don't show your face here!"

It was plain enough. It took but a short time to read. But it set the brain of Gloss Boyd whirling. "Mr. Nigger, mind you don't show your face here!" What did it mean?

The boy had from his childhood come in contact with white people. He had early learned modesty of bearing in their presence. But the relations between the white and coloured races in and around Hebron had been simple. The black man served—the white man ruled. There was little friction and less ill-feeling. Of those more complicated relations which existed in many parts of the country, of the strong feeling manifesting itself in strong expression, he knew nothing. Now, as he stood beneath that notice, a gulf seemed yawning at his feet. Not show his face? It was black, certainly, but—it was all the face he had.

Slowly the significance of the words dawned upon him, and he hastened to move away. He was not wanted here—in this railway station. It was solely for the white people, and it was incumbent upon him to get out of sight.

The road led through the town. He followed it in haste, coming presently into a wide square adorned on one side by the court house, and on the remaining three by the principal business establishments of the place. The usual features of a rural town in the South were to be seen. A horse dealer was leading a horse up and down to show its paces, some half dozen men standing by. Over by the post-office a small group of townspeople lingered patiently, waiting for the sorting of the mail just brought in from the train. A few shopkeepers, not

quite busy enough to be forced thereby to the exclusive spending of their time within their own shops, stood upon the sidewalk chatting with customers and acquaintances. From the further corner of the square the proprietor of the hotel looked leisurely down from the vantage of his own veranda upon the town and its doings. The boy had seen such a place before—with the difference that it had black faces in it. This had none.

He had hardly recognized the fact when a shout arose. "Nigger! Nigger! Look out, fellers. It's rainin' darkies."

Half a dozen shrill whistles sounded from as many parts.

"Ho, nigger! Get out! This ain't darky land."

A loud laugh followed the sally. The loungers were running now, and with something like terror Gloss perceived that they were running in his direction.

"Give chase! Down with the nigger! No darkies allowed in this county."

For a minute Gloss failed to understand. He interpreted the words as an unkind jest, and stood hesitating. Some of the faces nearest to him wore a laugh. The rest were distinctly hostile. A certain savageness of tone in the last speaker acted as a warning. A strong inclination to run seized upon the boy.

"Mischief on the darkies! They've been warned to keep out of this county. Down with the impudent nigger! Come on, fellers."

The sudden rush had brought the townsmen to the end of the square where Gloss stood bewildered. At the last shout a more definite impulse seemed to take possession of the crowd. They separated with the intent of surrounding the intruder, but at the last moment he turned and ran. He was beginning to understand now.

A laugh broke from the lips of the foremost of the pursuers as they halted to watch the fleeing negro.

"Give chase," shouted a dozen voices from behind.

From doorways and side streets men and boys came running into the square.

"A nigger hunt! Hi, Boney! Run him down, boy."

At the whistle that accompanied the words a great rough dog bounded upon the scene. His appearance was greeted with acclamation.

"Good for you! Boney knows a nigger. Hi, Boney! Run him down."

The rush bade fair to turn into a hunt. At the same time the advent of the dog proved suggestive. Whistles and shouts testified to the desire of the townsmen to engage other canine helpers in the chase. Some of the men dashed into the houses and returned with guns. Cries of "Give the darkey a lesson! We'll teach him to show himself in our preserves," reached the ears of Gloss Boyd.

He was already some distance ahead, making the most of the brief pause on the part of his pursuers. It took a few minutes to get the hunt in full swing, and by this time the human quarry was well in advance, though the run was all in favour of the hunters. Every inch of the ground was familiar to them; to the boy the country was strange.

At first he ran blindly, with the shouts of the men and the sharp yelping of the dogs striking terror to his heart. He dimly understood now that in walking through their county he had broken a regulation of the white men. Of the penalty attached to the crime he was as ignorant as he had been of committing it. What they would do with him if they caught him he could only guess. A bullet whizzing past was suggestive.

Possibly the object was to frighten rather than to kill. Anyhow, the bullet hit the road ahead of the boy, striking with a savage spat that sent the dust up.

"Down with him! Shoot the rascal!"

It would have been a stouter heart than that of Gloss Boyd that would not have quailed at the threat contained

in the words. It seemed to the negro that the voices were nearer. He cast a terrified glance over his shoulder. The men were coming on in a straggling line, the dog Boney leading by a hundred yards. If it had not been for an occasional call from his master, that animal would have spoiled the sport by prematurely bringing down the quarry. He was barely restrained from making a gallant dash that would have left the issue no longer doubtful. The sight of the great, savage-looking beast gave impetus to the flight of Gloss Boyd. He felt that he was running for his life. That dog meant mischief.

It was when the pace began to tell upon him, and the voices of his pursuers sounded clamorous in his ears, that the one overpowering impulse to keep on running yielded place to more intelligent thought. While not slackening his speed, he began to look around for possible shelter. The race was of such a nature that it could not be kept up indefinitely. As the white men showed no signs of abandoning it, he perceived that in the end he would be run down.

Before him the road stretched on, with as little indication of cover as of termination. Across the fields on his right, however, he perceived a line of wood. The sight gave him hope. If he could reach it, he might throw the hunters off the scent.

"That darky's got grit in him," commented one of the white men, as Gloss made a spurt that increased the distance between hunter and hunted.

A minute later the boy suddenly swerved from the course, leaped a fence that here shut in the fields of a plantation, and darted off across country. As he took that fence one of his bundles slipped from his fingers and went tumbling back into the road. That was how it came to pass that Boney presently sniffed contemptuously at Magnolia's corn bread, denuded of its wrappings, and lying ignominiously in the roadway.

"Come on, fellers! Here's the darky's larder!"

The first comer kicked the big loaves contemptuously, and turned with a laugh to those who followed.

"Hungry nigger, that!" sneered another. "We'll give him a taste of another sort of provender. His tribe's got to learn, and we're the boys to teach 'em."

By this time dogs and men were over the fence, and the hunt was in full swing again. The negro was running directly for the timber. He had not missed the bundle. It would have made little difference if he had. He would not have dared to stop long enough to pick it up. He was running desperately now, with no attempt to husband strength. It was the wood and escape, or—he knew not what. But in imagination he felt the fangs of that dog in his throat, and he ran as he had never run before.

The trees were over his head at last, their friendly shelter hiding him from his pursuers. He was no sooner well in the shadow of a growth of pines than he turned aside, completely changing his course. He had not forgotten that his enemies had the aid of dogs, and when he encountered a broad stream flowing through the wood he did not for a moment hesitate to plunge into it. Dripping with perspiration, he found the cold water grateful. It reached up to his waist, and grew deeper as he waded along it. Not until it brought him to a thicket where low-reaching branches of trees slapped him in the face, and entangling vines more than once almost hurled him back, did he leave its bed. He hoped that he had kept to the water long enough to throw the dogs off the scent.

The thicket in which he found himself had to all appearance no outlet but by way of the stream. The tangle of wood and vine was in places dense, and the yielding moss beneath his feet warned him that he was plunging into a swamp of the nature of which he was dangerously ignorant. Of the unknown perils ahead, however, he did not stop to think. The perils in the rear—far from

unknown—appealed more strongly to his imagination, and he pushed on. The sharp yelp of the dogs had in the last few minutes grown faint, an indication that the hunters had turned in the wrong direction. Gloss went steadily forward, fighting his way through the tangle, now sinking above his ankles in mud, now struggling for a time to firmer foothold. Then breath and strength suddenly failed him. He stumbled blindly forward for a minute longer, and stopped.

"I sho'ly can't go no further."

His heart was beating like a sledge hammer, and his legs refused to carry him. It was fairly evident that he was right. There was not another spurt left in him. If the white men found him here it was all over with him.

He looked round for some place to crawl into, some shelter more secure than that of the thicket alone. He found it in a heap of rotting vines and trees, large enough to conceal a human body. Under this he wormed his way, curling himself up on the wet ground. Then he lay and waited.

It was not long before the sounds of pursuit were again borne on the air. The hunters had circled round, and were approaching the swamp. He could hear the harsh, deep cry of the dog Boney momentarily coming nearer. He felt that his fate would soon be decided, and lay waiting for it.

He was frightened—horribly frightened. It is never a pleasant sensation to be followed by a shouting, clamouring mob. White men meeting with such an experience in foreign lands have been known to be afraid. Gloss was not a white man, but a black one in whom the timidity of his race was very fully developed. As he lay there he tasted something of the bitterness of death.

In his innocence of all thought of offence, this terror which had come upon him seemed a strange happening. He had known all along that, in the present low condition of his people, to be a negro was to be an inferior being.

At this moment he went further and realized for the first time that it was a misfortune to be a black man.

As the thought came to him, the horror and wrong of it all overpowered him. His breast heaved, and short, smothered sobs burst from his lips.

"Oh, God, I didn't make myself black!"

The low cry coming from his overburdened heart terrified him. He pressed his shaking lips into the damp moss to deaden the sound of the sobs that escaped them. At that moment a bullet, shot at random, came spat against a tree overhead, and dropped, spent and harmless, upon the rotting wood that covered him. It told him that the critical moment had arrived.

He could plainly hear now the voices of the men as they urged the dogs on. He could even distinguish the instant when the animals took to the stream, the splash of their plunge into the water being distinctly audible. His heart was beating so violently that it seemed trying to burst its bonds. He was momentarily expecting the end.

It was longer delayed than he anticipated. Suspense grew almost intolerable while the pursuers hunted up and down for the trail. More than once, with sharp yelps, the dogs followed it down to the water, splashing in with much show of zeal, but invariably returning baffled. Apparently the men preferred to let the dogs do all the swimming. The stream was too wide to jump across, and a cold plunge proved unattractive in the existing weather. For an hour that seemed an eternity Gloss listened to the hubbub. Then—was it possible?—the hunt swept back, and the sounds became remote.

In truth, the pursuers were trying fresh tactics. They had called off the dogs, and were bound for the opposite side of the swamp, convinced that before this the negro had made his escape from the dangers that threatened him in the rear. Their object was to come up with him as he emerged from the wood.

"It'll take him some time to get out of there," declared

the master of the dog Boney. "I wouldn't run through that swamp to save my skin—if it was a black one."

They laughed, and plunged on through the trees.

By this means it happened that Gloss lay for hours hoping and fearing, now catching faintly the distant sounds of pursuit, now remaining long in uncertainty whether or not the hunt had been abandoned. Gradually the fever in his blood cooled. He felt the chill of his wet clothing. The moss beneath him was as full of water as a wet sponge. His cramped position was not conducive to the rapid circulation of the blood. He began to realize that he was numb with cold.

He had eaten nothing since early morning, and the day was now far advanced. Fear and violent exertion had had an exhausting effect. He was shaking as with ague, but he dared not rise. At any moment the hunters might burst upon him in full chase. The chattering of his teeth kept him from hearing plainly. Again and again he thought the pursuers were returning.

Long after the hunt was abandoned, and the hunters had gone back to the town, the man who had unwittingly erred in daring to show a black face in a county that white men had set apart for their exclusive use lay shivering in the swamp. When darkness fell, he crawled from beneath the brushwood, and stood erect, looking up. The heavens were overspread with clouds.

"It too dark to know a black man from a white one," he said.

Then he slowly felt his way out of the swamp, waded through the cold water of the stream, and cautiously retraced his steps to the road.

All that night he walked, following the road, not knowing where it led. He discovered the loss of Magnolia's bundle when hunger drove him to think of food. When light enough dawned in the sky to show his face as that of a black man, he took to the woods, and with his hunger and fear for company hid himself from the white men to whom his presence was an affront.

## CHAPTER IV.

"You sho'ly not need hide you self no longer, Miss Esther. They done gone, every last man of 'em."

The thick, red lips of the speaker parted in a broad smile as she unceremoniously opened a door and thrust her head inside the room. Her eyes travelled briskly round, to rest on a tall figure that occupied the only low chair the place contained. There was a laugh in those eyes as they fell upon the young girl sitting there. It must have had its birth in some hidden fund of amusement, for there was nothing in the appearance of the girl who raised her head at the servant's abrupt entrance to awaken merriment. Her face was grave—very grave—and there was upon it at the present moment a look of annoyance.

The look was not caused by the sudden appearance of the coloured servant. It had been there before, in an intensified form. It did not rob the countenance of attractiveness, as anger or annoyance is apt to do. Its effect was rather to accentuate the proud lines into which the face habitually fell. Those who knew Esther Ross said she would have been beautiful if there had been less of pride in her face. They were wrong. Those lines that suggested pride were in direct harmony with every movement and pose of the tall, slight figure. One could not imagine the character of Esther Ross with the pride left out; and if the outward signs of that quality could have been effaced from the girl's countenance, there would have been a lack of symmetry, an obvious untruthfulness in nature's manifestations which would have been more disastrous to beauty than was the most undisguised form of the pride complained of. As it was, though not distinctly beautiful, the girl was more than attractive.

"Very well, Kissie. I will come down presently."

The voice was low and well modulated. It was free from any suggestion of either perturbation or relief. If Kissie's information afforded any ground for satisfaction, the fact did not appear. Possibly the coloured girl overestimated the young lady's desire that "every last man of them" should have departed.

Kissie was in no hurry to go. She stood swinging the door slightly back and forth, her own ample form almost filling the space thus made.

"Lor, Miss Esther," she exclaimed, when after a minute's silence she found that lady's eyes fixed inquiringly upon her, "you not take no notice of the young master. He say a heap more'n he mean."

The slightest possible flush gave a momentary warmth to the ivory tint of the face into which Kissie was looking, and as slight a frown crossed it.

"You may go now, Kissie," said the lady quietly. "I will come down soon."

Kissie retreated, shutting the door slowly. A minute later she partially opened it again.

"Miss Marie desp'rate mad," she said, thrusting the words in through the wide crack she had established. "She sho'ly dis'pinted she not go with them."

Esther hesitated. Once she opened her lips and closed them again. When she spoke, it was calmly as before.

"Tell Miss Marie I will join her in a few minutes."

The words were a concession. She had not meant to say them. It was a feeling of pride that suggested them—the sort of pride that had very much to do with the life of Esther Ross. She stood in the position of guest to Marie Renshaw, and thus standing she was impelled to put personal feeling on one side.

She went down the stairs a few minutes later with a smile on her lips.

"Oh, here you are. I thought you had disappeared for good."

The speaker, a diminutive, dark-eyed, dark-skinned

Southern girl, dashing and brilliant, lay curled up on a lounge beneath one of the windows of the broad hall.

"No," replied Esther, with a half laugh, "it was for evil. I wanted to rail at your brother, and I thought a private interview with myself the most polite way of meeting my own wishes."

"Oh, you don't understand Ted," replied the little brunette, sitting up and growing animated. "He's a nice boy enough. Everybody can't have your—ahem—peculiar notions."

"Do you mean to say you sympathize with that—that crowd?"

The girl drew herself up a little taller, and her hand swept out toward a long stretch of trees. There was no crowd visible there—or anywhere else.

Marie laughed.

"Bless you, child, didn't I take your part—and the nigger's?" she said. "Don't disturb that placid soul of yours with the imaginary wrongs of the coloured race. Take my word for it that if Ted and his friends shoot a darky, it's going to be the darky's own fault."

"You're a renegade," began Esther indignantly, "a—"

"A bloodthirsty oppressionist," interrupted Marie, coining a word for the occasion. "Esther Ross, be it known to you that though I wouldn't have deserted you for the world in your famous controversy of half an hour ago—My! didn't you do the offended goddess to perfection, though? I am afraid in your heat you missed the faintest glimmer of a smile that appeared on the lips of a certain tall cavalier—though, as I say, I would not have dreamed of leaving you to fight out that famous fight alone, in my heart I said, 'Esther, you are a goose.'"

The black eyes of the speaker shot out a mischievous flame toward her friend's face. There was a suspicion of malice in those eyes. It was well hidden by the fun, but it was there.

"I'm sorry for your heart," said Esther coolly.

"No, you're not. You never have any sorrow for a

sinner, and you dub us all sinners just now. Your attitude toward such is one of scorn. And all because Ted, poor boy, gets together a few of his friends with the laudable intent of helping a neighbour in a time of need. Why," she added, rising suddenly to her feet, "is a man to be robbed night after night by those niggers and do nothing? Isn't a man's corn his own? And you look daggers, and electric currents, and everything else that's scorching and dangerous, at poor Ted and his friends because they were unselfish enough to watch all night in the neighbourhood of an injured man's corn bin."

Esther shook her head.

"You know better, little girl," she said. "There's no possible harm in watching by a corn bin to catch a thief, but *you* know they were in no fit state to deal justly with anybody. Forgive me, Marie, he is your brother, but—he had been drinking—they had all been drinking. Do you think they were in a condition to control themselves, let alone to be trusted with those guns? Even a thief has a right to ordinary humane treatment," she added warmly, "and to receive the legal punishment for his crimes."

Marie shrugged her shoulders.

"If that corn thief be caught, he'll be apt to get all the legal punishment he wants," she laughed. "My dearest friend, you are a simpleton. Do you think Ted meant half of what he said? You don't understand him. He's hot tempered, and you—you're an icicle. You act as an irritant. You meet him with those coldly searching questions of yours, and he—well, he gives the rein to his tongue and talks of what he would have done if the nigger had turned up. 'Twas all talk, not worth the breath it cost. And you took it for gospel."

"He said it, and he must take the consequences," said Esther coldly.

"He has taken them. He has gone off in a tantrum, and you're responsible," replied her friend.

Esther looked as if the responsibility were not greater than she could bear.

Suddenly the little lady by her side gave herself a vigorous shake.

"I should like to shake you, Esther Ross," she said. "They would have invited us to go shooting with them. I know it. They are not going far. It would at least have been a change from our own company. And now we are left forlorn, to—"

"Mourn for their desertion?" asked Esther satirically. "Nay, but my tears will not choke me. Get your hat and we will go out. The woods are free."

"I don't see why Mr. Heathcote chose to go with them," grumbled Marie, as the two girls traversed a cross street and made for the woods. "He was not one of the delinquents."

Esther did not answer. Perhaps she was not interested in the doings of the gentleman in question; perhaps there were other reasons for her silence. It lasted until they had passed into the shadow of the trees.

Down here in Alabama there was in the woods a suggestion of spring. Though January was not yet past, Esther was sanguine enough to poke in sheltered places for the first flower buds. She did not find them, but the search kept her eyes for the most part fixed upon the ground. She was bound for a little, thickly wooded hollow that promised better results, when Marie suddenly darted ahead.

"I'll reach it first, and call you a laggard," she cried, tripping over the ground with a lightness of foot that brought her into the deeper shadow before her friend. A gay laugh was on her lips as she darted in between the trees, the easy grace of her movements suggesting the unfettered denizens of the forest itself. She seemed to have caught for the moment the spirit of the woods, or was it only that her eyes were keen of vision, and that afar off, in a line with this hollow, a man's hat had for a moment been visible through the network of branches?

"Hurrah! Esther, my dear, I've—Oh—h!"

The last word was prolonged into a shrill scream. Marie had dashed into the heart of the thicket, and almost into the arms of a negro, who, half-dazed, and wholly surprised, was scrambling to his feet.

A second scream, louder and more prolonged, rang through the forest. It brought an answering shout.

"Hush! Don't scream. They will think you are hurt. Don't you know that under suspicious circumstances it is dangerous to be a black man?"

Esther spoke sharply. She had grasped her companion's arm. Her first hurried look as she followed Marie into the hollow had convinced her that the negro was considerably more frightened than was the girl.

"I not meanin' to hurt anybody, miss," said Gloss Boyd hastily. "The lady need not be scared. I sho'ly feelin' tired and sit down to rest. Then I reckon I go to sleep."

Another scream from Marie interrupted his explanation. Esther gave her friend's arm an impatient shake.

"Be quiet," she said. "There is nothing to be afraid of. You'll bring the whole troop of them back again."

At that moment there was a crashing among the bushes, and a tall, well-formed man burst in on the group.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "Has that nigger—Miss Ross, you are not hurt?"

Already his hand, with the grip of an athlete in it, was on Gloss Boyd's shoulder. His eyes had travelled to the face of Esther Ross.

"Oh, Mr. Heathcote, I'm so thankful you were within hearing," gasped Marie. "We were frightened to death."

"Nonsense," responded Esther bluntly. "Your nerves are proof against a greater strain than the sudden stumbling across a sleeping negro. I'm ashamed of you, Marie."

There was a scornful ring in the voice. Marie turned appealingly to the newcomer, and put her hand on his arm.

"I shall not be afraid now," she said.

He smiled, but he was still looking at Esther.

"You are sure you are not hurt—nor frightened?"

He found it necessary to lean slightly forward, so that his eyes could look directly into those deep grey ones before him. There was nothing appealing in *them,* but beneath his gaze the ivory tint of the girl's face took to itself a soft, rosy hue. The proud lips fell into a smile that was more than half mocking.

"Frightened at what?" she asked, in the low, clear-cut tones that had come to her as an heirloom from a long line of ancestors. "I know of nothing to hurt me. As to fear, I think the poor fellow whom Marie first ran over and then almost terrified out of his wits with her acutely penetrating shrieks, is the greater sufferer there."

He smiled.

"And the fellow has done you no harm?" he said.

"On the contrary," began Esther, but Marie cut her short.

"Harm!" she ejaculated. "He has nearly scared me to death. Mr. Heathcote, Esther's nerves are iron. I am shaking still."

What could he do but put his disengaged arm around her protectingly?

"Nay, but there is nothing to fear," he said.

She smiled up at him tremulously.

"I shall get over it soon," she said.

The hand of the newcomer had not loosened its grip on Gloss Boyd's shoulder. At this juncture the gentleman turned his attention to his prisoner.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded sharply.

"Waitin' till the ladies git over their scare," was the simple answer. "I wasn't meanin' to hurt nobody. The lady said right. I was asleep till the little lady woke me —nearly tromped over me."

"What did you come in these woods for?" asked Mr. Heathcote.

"I was jest passin' through, sah," replied Gloss.

"Where are you going?"

"To Tuskadela, sah."

"To the school?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why didn't you go, then? We want no loafers in these woods."

"I was goin', sah, but I was sho'ly tired."

It was a statement not hard to credit. The boy looked travel-worn and weary, altogether unlike the Gloss Boyd who had started from Hebron with the courage of a great purpose in his heart and the proofs of Magnolia's sisterly attentions in the spick-and-span condition of every article of his very humble apparel. To-day his clothes were mud-stained and torn, and his face bore evidences of the hardships of his long tramp. Hunger and fear and exposure had left their mark on him. The hunger had been habitual since the dog Boney sniffed scornfully at the corn bread that had formed the young man's main dependence for the journey.

He had been forced to break into his two dollars, but he had done it sparingly. Apart from his desire to save the money, the fear of entering any village until he had first seen men of his own colour walking therein in safety had deterred him from buying food. He had learned to lie in wait, and make sure of his position before he ventured to show himself. His terrifying experience of the exclusiveness of some of the white people had left a deep impression on his mind. He was not shaken in his determination to go on to Tuskadela, but the obstacles in the way of raising himself and his people looked greater to-day than when he faced them in imagination in Hebron.

"Are you a student at Tuskadela?"

Mr. Heathcote's tone was still peremptory and suspicious.

"No, sah."

"Then what are you going there for?"

"I'm goin' to be one, sah. I journeyin' from my home to that school."

The gentleman relaxed his hold of his prisoner's shoulder, and moved a step away, his arm still protectingly encircling the shrinking form of Marie Renshaw.

"Go on, then," he said, "and don't take to frightening ladies again, or you may find yourself in trouble."

"I not need to rest again, sah," replied Gloss, turning a pair of honest eyes on Marie's protector. "I think that school not very far away."

"About twelve miles," said Mr. Heathcote.

"Thank you, sah."

Gloss trudged off, glad to be allowed to proceed on his way, and Mr. Heathcote looked down upon Marie with a smile that had a little raillery in it.

"Your enemy seems a very harmless nigger, Miss Renshaw," he said.

She looked at him with a shudder, prettily suppressed.

"I am not often afraid," she said. "But the encounter was so sudden, and my nerves are not as iron-cased as are Esther's. It is very foolish, but I feel positively afraid to traverse this wood alone."

What could he do but turn about with her and see the two girls home? Marie kept her place by his side. Esther was sometimes ahead, and sometimes far behind. In the latter case it was remarkable how often Franklin Heathcote's head was turned over his shoulder.

It is quite within the bounds of possibility that neither of the three found that walk tiresome. Marie so far recovered her spirits as to chatter gaily. As for Mr. Heathcote, his laugh rang out full and free more than once, and his undeniably handsome face wore a very amiable look as he followed the two girls into the house.

## CHAPTER V.

TUSKADELA at last, with its long stretch of handsome buildings, before which a footsore, hungry youth stood staring in silent amazement. He had expected much, but nothing to equal this. It was almost a town, and all devoted to the education of his race. As he looked upon those halls and grounds, there came to him a stronger appreciation of the dignity of the education he sought. It was long before he summoned courage to enter the precincts. It might perchance have been longer if a young man wearing the uniform of the school, and on duty at the gate, had not accosted him.

"Good-afternoon," said the erect, well-clad student pleasantly.

"Good-afternoon, sah," responded Gloss, advancing toward the gate. "Is this Tuskadela, sah?"

"Yes," replied the other. "Should you like to come in and see it?"

Gloss smiled.

"I reckon I'll have to," he said, "I've come nigh on four hundred miles to git to it."

"You're coming here to school?"

"Yes, sah."

The tone was proud.

"Then you'll want to see the principal?"

"Yes, sah."

He was inside those gates now, walking by the side of the young man who had accosted him, and who pointed out to him the buildings that served as dormitories, and those which were devoted to certain forms of instruction.

"Are you going to be a work student or a pay student?" asked the guide.

"I cert'nly reckon it's a work student," replied Gloss. "I sho'ly got to pay my way with work. There no other way for me."

They met many students going hither and thither. All greeted Gloss and his guide with civility, though more than one glance was sufficiently prolonged to suggest curiosity. Everybody seemed busy. Everybody looked neat and trim. Gloss felt uncomfortably conscious of his mud-stained clothing.

The young student took him into the hall of a large building, where doors and staircaises were numerous enough to bewilder the country youth. Presently he found himself in the presence of an official of the place, answering a sufficiently long list of questions to the satisfaction of his interlocutor. His guide had been dismissed to return to his post by the gate, and when the preliminary questioning came to an end another youth was dispatched with Gloss to the office of the principal.

The heart of Gloss Boyd beat heavily. It was so imposing to a country lad, this big institution, where all seemed to work by law, and everybody fitted into a certain place. By the side of the desultory life of the plantation, the easy-go-lucky progress of the days, and the freedom from all restraint, this was almost painful.

He found himself altogether too soon in an office where a young girl of his own race sat deftly fingering a typewriter. A door leading into an inner room was closed.

"The principal is engaged now, but I'll tell him you are here," said the girl.

In the interval of waiting Gloss had time to think of the motives that had prompted him to attempt this great undertaking, which perhaps looked greater to-day than ever before, and to strengthen his heart to persevere.

"You wanted to see me, young man?"

The inner door had been opened, and a visitor dis-

missed. The speaker now stood in the doorway, a man of medium height and somewhat stout build. He was a black man, as were all who ruled in that institution.

Even in that first glance Gloss was struck with the massive strength and strong determination of this man. His was not an imposing figure, but as those searching eyes fixed themselves upon the new student, Gloss felt as if they saw through him. Here was the personality that underlay this vast machine, that had evolved it bit by bit. Gloss did not need to be told that he was in the presence of the principal.

The eyes travelled over the young man in slow, unhurried fashion before their owner spoke again.

"Well, young man, what do you want with me?" he asked, after that leisurely scrutiny.

"An education, sah."

There was another long look, and then the principal intimated his desire that the newcomer should enter his private office.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Hebron, in Florida, sah."

"How did you get here?"

"Walked, sah."

"All the way?"

"Yes, sah."

The searching gaze of those sharp eyes had never left the young man's face. Suddenly the hand of the older man went out, pointing toward a seat.

"You must have much to tell me," he said. "Sit down."

Gloss obeyed. Something in that strongly knit figure gave him confidence while it stimulated him to put forth the best that was in him. He sat down, his eyes meeting squarely and honestly those others that were still fixed upon him.

"Where did you get those mud stains on your clothes?" asked the older man.

"In the swamp, sah."

"Hum! Did you make a practice of sleeping in the swamp?"

There was a twinkle in the eye of the speaker.

"No, sah. White men run me there and I have to hide."

"What for?" The words rang out like a challenge. "You have no right to do anything which will make hiding necessary. Our people must learn to conduct themselves so that they need not run to hide their faces."

"It my face that offend, sah," replied Gloss. "I do nothing but show it."

There was conscious innocence upon that face now.

The principal looked into it, and the sternness of his own was modified.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"The notice read, sah, 'Mr. Nigger, mind you don't show your face here!' I done showed it. I not think it mean anywhere—everywhere—and I go on. Then they hunt me—with guns and dogs—and I hide in the swamp. It wet my clothes through, sah, and I not able to get them clean again."

The words ended in a short, sharp cough.

"How long have you had that cough?" asked the principal.

"Jest a few days, sah."

The older man looked at him closely.

"Tell me all about that day, and what you did in the town," he said. "*All* you did, mind."

"Yes, sah," replied Gloss quietly. "It not take a great while to tell. I walk along the road till I come to where the railway cars draws in. Then I stop and look, and I see that board, sah. And I think it mean not show my face jest there, and I go on to the town. And men cry 'Nigger! Nigger! Run him down!' And they run, and the dogs run, and I run. That's all, sah."

The eyes of the principal and those of the young man met, and there came a slow smile to the principal's lips.

He was not unskilled in the reading of character, this man at the head of an institution that drew into itself coloured youth from all parts and of all stamps.

"What sort of an education do you want?"

The question came after a noticeable pause.

"A minister's, sah."

A look of disappointment crossed the principal's face. He had too often seen men choose to preach rather than work.

"Better learn farming," he said sharply. "There's more religion in ploughing a field well than in living in idleness and squalor all the week, and shouting yourself hoarse on Sunday."

"That's true, sah," said Gloss respectfully. "I ain't contemplatin' bein' that sort of a minister, sah. We'se got plenty of they-uns now. I want to learn to be a farmer, and anything else you'll learn me to be. I'm aimin' to plough, and pick cotton, and grow corn, and do everything my hand find to do all the week, sah, and tell my people some of the things they not know on the Sunday. Ain't that religion, sah?"

"Perhaps," was the smiling answer. The principal was looking into the face that had for the moment awoke to earnest animation, being wonderfully changed thereby from its former expression. "Why do you wish to preach on Sunday?"

"They missin' the way, sah," said Gloss earnestly. "They sho'ly am. There nobody among them to tell them. I reckon it worth doin' to learn to grow better cotton, and do all they things better'n I use to, and study to be a minister at the same time. Then, maybe, when I know how well, I able to make them see that gettin' happy sure ain't the best part of religion. I'll earn my livin', sah, same then as I've done till now. I ain't reckonin' on gittin' nothin' out of anybody for tellin' 'em a better way."

The principal talked long with the young man. What

he did not know of his past life and present prospects when the interview was over was what he did not want to know.

In the end Gloss found himself a student of Tuskadela, with seventy-five cents in his pocket after the entrance fee was paid, and a little exultation mingled with a good deal of fear in his heart at the thought that he was a part of this vast institution.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Bless de chile! She cert'nly got dat letter. Dar no mistakin' de mighty onrush of dat pace she advancin' at."

Uncle Pete rubbed his woolly head and watched the approach of Magnolia Boyd. The "onrush" was sufficient to carry everything before it. In truth Magnolia saw nothing but the cabin in the distance, toward which an overpowering impulse impelled her. Her hand held a letter grasped tightly. As for her face, it held imprisoned a mighty wrath, a passion and horror that froze it into a set stillness.

"It's done come, then?"

Uncle Pete's voice rang along the roadway jubilantly. He could not wait until the girl came near.

She made him no answer, only advanced with the same quick stride. He stood and watched her.

"What does he say, chile?"

She was nearer now. At the words she raised her arm, and the white message came hurtling through the air.

"Read it. I sho'ly can't."

The letter fell at his feet. The old man stooped and picked it up.

"Lor, honey!" he said, and drew it from the envelope.

Then all was still. Uncle Pete was laboriously spelling his way through those closely written pages. Magnolia stood and looked at him, the hard anger yet in her face.

"De Lord pity dem white men! Dey sho' nuff a heap lower down dan de nigger."

The old man's voice broke the stillness.

"Pity *them!* Them? Uncle Pete, I wish—I wish that for one day there was a God in heaven that was *black.*"

The words rushed forth with the force of a tornado. Back of them was the impression left by one of those closely written pages where the hand of Gloss Boyd had traced with straightforward simplicity the story of a man hunt. Since she had read those words the soul of Magnolia Boyd had been on fire.

"Things does look mighty onequal," said Uncle Pete solemnly. "But dis yere's de work of de debil. De debil he git into a white man jes' as quick as into a black man. He no respecter of persons, honey. Dem white men despise a nigger 'cause he been a black slave. Lor, honey, de men what could do dat away is worse slaves to de debil dan de black nigger eber was to dem. De debil he plan dat hunt, and he drive his slaves on."

"I should like to kill them—every one."

She said the words slowly and emphatically, with a hard hatred that was convincing in its force. The eyes of the old negro travelled to the girl's face, and he shook his head slowly.

"Chile, anger an' hatred won't neber right no wrong," he said. "Here's two races o' men sot de one agin de oder. De white man, by de reason of his long enjoyment of counterless advantages, should nachelly be de one dat's de highest, an' dat know how to conduct hisself de best, an' how to treat de oder right. Chile, he's fell ter'ble below his privileges. He way down wid his master de debil. What den? Dere remain on'y one thing. De black man he must jes' rise up an' shew hisself great. De low-down nigger must raise hisself high nuff to forgive, an' not to give back blow for blow. It'll sot him above de white man when he do it, but dat de white man's fault for cert'n."

The girl looked at him with the same hard stare.

"Forgive!" she said. "I wouldn't if I could. They hunted him with dogs—*him*—Gloss. And he'd walked all them miles to git learnin' that would raise the black man to a level with the white."

Again the old man's head was shaken solemnly.

"De debil's mighty misleadin', chile," he said. "Ain't you neber hear tell of de dizzy heights? Dat's whar he's sot dem white men, sho'. Dey done clumb up dere so high dat dey not able to see nothin' no more but dey own highness, an' dey look down, down to de worl' beneath an' dere heads swim. Course dey does. It want a steady head not to stumble on dem heights. Dey sho'ly fall—dem what stays dar. Chile, de on'y safe thing is to climb up a bit higher dan dat, to de great heights where de good God keep His people, an' where dey so high dey looks up an' not down, an' is far above de worshippin' of deyselves. Dem highest places mighty lonesome, chile, for dey neber full. De man what git dar, he de man for a friend. He high nuff to be shet of hisself, an' he like de good God got room in his heart for dem what didn't be born wid a white face an' wid all de spetcial advantages what's been give to hisself."

Magnolia made no answer. To reach above the white man by force of a greater magnanimity was too far off a vision for her. She was hot with indignation, and the victory that comes by patient bearing of injustice offered no consoling balm. That burning sense of wrong was too strong for the words of Uncle Pete to mollify. And with the hatred and the anger had come a sense of disability, an awakening to limitations that had never before oppressed her. She had thought, with Gloss, that the limitations of the negro lay wholly in himself. Now she realized in some dim way that before he could stand a man, the peer of other men, the negro had two barriers to surmount—the weakness of his own character and the bounds set about him by the weakness of the white man's character.

"I wish he had never gone! Oh, I wish he had never gone!"

The cry rang through and through her heart, but it found no voice in words. She was too proud to let it

fall upon the ear of any, even of one as sympathetic as Uncle Pete. Nevertheless, it was the temporary uprising of despair, the first appalled glimpse of the soul at the difficulties of the way that led for her race up to honour and manhood.

She put her brother's letter back into the envelope, and for days she did not read it again. Why should she? One scene it depicted was burned into her soul. But when she wrote to Gloss she touched lightly the incident of the hunting.

"If they-all thought they was goin' to stop you, they was mighty poor reckoners," she said. "I wish you could have seen Uncle Shadrach when Uncle Pete told him about them great buildin's at the school. He jest jumped right off his chair and come and shook his fist in Uncle Pete's face. 'Dat boy'll neber be no good no more,' he said. 'He'll be dat oplifted dat he'll neber foller no plough, an' as for choppin' de weeds outer de corn, he'll be a-droppin' down on his knees a 'xaminin' 'em instead to see if he can't git some sky-falutin' name to call 'em by. You look a yere, Uncle Pete. De nigger race better stick to de cotton field. It a plentshus wide field nuff for dem.' "

## CHAPTER VII.

"WHAT are you doing with that cough still?"

The principal of Tuskadela was crossing the grounds from his house to his office. He had half a dozen things on his mind. When did it happen that the principal of Tuskadela had not half a dozen things on his mind? Nevertheless, he stood quietly looking at Gloss Boyd.

"Nothing, sah," said Gloss with a smile. "It's the cough that has doings with me."

"How do you spell 'sir'?" asked the principal quickly.

"I know, sir. I'm tryin' to git it right," said the boy, with a gesture of understanding.

The principal smiled.

"Find you have plenty to learn, eh?"

The honest eyes of the boy sought the principal's face.

"Does a man ever git to the end of that learnin', sir?" he asked. "I cert'nly think there's more every day."

The man who stood at the head of all the activity of Tuskadela laughed.

"And the longer you live the more you'll find," he said. "Are you afraid of the labour?"

"No, sir." There was another straightforward glance from those honest eyes. "But I'm afraid of failin'."

The hand of the principal fell on the lad's shoulder.

"My boy, there's only one way up for our race," he said. "We are a people undeveloped. We are set in the midst of a race of men who have centuries of development behind them. We have got to climb from the bottom step by step, and there's no hope for either cowards or shirkers."

The eyes of Gloss Boyd were fixed on his face. They had kindled.

"I ain't a shirker, sir," he said. "Maybe I'm a coward, for my heart sho'ly fail more'n once."

A quick smile came to the lips of the principal.

"Go on," he said. "Don't give that heart any hearing. The way up is steep, but you can climb it. Any man can win if he has determination enough. And it is worth it. My boy, every coloured man who makes himself respected in this land of America is doing a service, not to himself alone, but also to his race. The world questions our ability to rise higher than one step above the brutes. Let each individual negro strive to make himself a power, to prove that he has a head to guide his hands, and a soul to direct the head. Then this controversy about the status of the races will die a natural death."

The hand upon the shoulder of Gloss Boyd pressed heavily. Something in this country boy's face had drawn the words from the older man's lips. He stood looking at the new student, and a smile gradually spread over his face.

"I'll try, sir."

The smile broadened.

"And so will I. It takes a lot of trying to succeed, and every man has his own set of difficulties to encounter."

The principal passed on, and Gloss Boyd went to his room to wash away the marks of toil before the supper bell rang.

Those first weeks at Tuskadela had tried the stuff of which the young man was made. Hitherto he had lived a life of desultory effort, working hard enough upon occasion, but finding intervals between the labour when his own will was his law. Here every moment, from earliest morning till the retiring bell put a stop to the day's activities, was full of strenuous effort. The semi-military routine observed in the institution left nothing to the will of the student. Every act of life was performed according to rule, and the character that had been formed amidst the happy-go-lucky surroundings of a not too-well-

looked-after plantation found the training severe. The young man bent all his energies to the tasks assigned him, but none the less he felt the strain of the unaccustomed routine.

He had entered as a work student, labouring all day at an industrial calling in payment for his board. The lad was scrupulously conscientious in the discharge of every duty. But everything was strange, and the multitude of regulations appalled him. He made some ludicrous mistakes, and wore himself out with misdirected efforts. And when supper was over, and the hour for the night school came, he found himself dull and stupid. Nevertheless he was not dismayed.

"There's a mighty heap to learn," he said, "and I cert'nly am a bigger fool than I knowed, but I'll do it yet."

And he set his face doggedly, and forced his puzzled brain to go over and over the studies that at first presented almost insurmountable difficulties to the country boy, tired out with the day's activities.

He did not know it, but that dogged determination to learn, and the humble acceptance of his own stupidity, did more to disarm criticism among teachers and students than any brilliancy on his part would have done.

It was during his first day at Tuskadela that he met with a taste of ridicule. He had struggled through the mysteries of the rising bell, the warning breakfast bell, the breakfast bell itself, when lack of promptness to take one's place meant a hungry morning, the cleaning of his room, or such part of it as fell to his share, and the morning work bell. He had learned so many new things about old tasks in the agricultural work committed to him that his head was in a whirl, and he had at last come into the big dining hall for dinner in company with seven or eight hundred young men and women, many of them older than himself. That perfectly orderly crowd disconcerted him. Everybody but himself knew what to do. He alone was at a loss. There was terror to him in the appointments

of the table. He who was accustomed to stretch his legs before the cabin fire and enjoy his hunch of corn bread dipped in a can of syrup, saw in table napkins and table appliances a new series of difficulties.

At the earlier meal he had been almost too much bewildered to know what was going on around him. Now his vision cleared, and he looked down the rows of small tables where boys and girls were chattering gaily, and wondered whether he should ever feel at ease, and know how to handle readily these new conveniences. A titter of amusement at his awkward efforts awoke him to the consciousness that he was blundering. It was then that he turned to the lad by his side with the disarming remark: "I sure don't know what all these things are for. I've never used such in my life. You must tell me what to do with them."

The boy addressed was a thoughtless lad, one of the younger ones in the institution. He saw nothing in the appeal but a situation that was amusing, and he laughed aloud. The hot blood mounted to the cheek of Gloss Boyd. But before the laugh had died away, a young man, tall and less substantially built than most of those around him, leaned forward.

"You're not the first that's found this place strange," he said pleasantly. "You'll get used to all this soon. I'll post you."

"Thank you, sah," said Gloss, raising grateful eyes to the face opposite.

He saw a dark, cleanly formed man of twenty or thereabouts, one whose face, had it been white, would have been styled handsome. Oval and delicate in outline, it suggested the high caste Hindoo rather than the typical African. A certain ease of manner bespoke the man as one who had not begun at the bottom rung of the ladder. He took little part in the chatter going on around him, and Gloss noticed that his silence was respected. Something in the bearing of the young negro fitted into the

character of the student. Gloss understood without explanation that this young man had not come to Tuskadela, as had the majority of the scholars there, to lay the foundation of an education.

In truth, Free Stanlin was the heart's joy of the energetic professor who directed the scientific studies of the young men and women of Tuskadela. All other searchers into nature's secrets came occasionally—in some cases more than occasionally—under the gentle ridicule or severer sarcasm of this enthusiastic professor, but Free Stanlin's turn came never. Teacher and pupil stood on common ground in their eagerness to search out the mysteries of the natural world. Five days in the week the young man devoted a small percentage of his energies to the further acquisition of the common English branches, and the major part of them to scientific study. One day of the six it was incumbent upon him, as upon every student at Tuskadela, to engage in practical, industrial work with a view to acquiring a mastery over some one calling. He chose agriculture, as exemplifying in practice a part of the knowledge gained in the other five days. His heart was not in farming, however. His eyes would never kindle over a new variety of beet, or grow eager at the sight of a well-fatted hog.

Those same eyes were, on the first day that Gloss spent at Tuskadela, regarding the newcomer with more interest than they usually expressed for the younger and smaller fry of this educational army.

"You are in the agricultural department, I think," he said, after a minute's silence, adding in an undertone: "Here, that thing opens this way, and is meant to be disposed of so."

"Yes, sah. Thank you, sah," said Gloss, the mysteries of a table napkin being thus unfolded to him.

"Then I shall be along your way to-morrow," continued Free. "It's my work day, and I'm in for agriculture. How are you getting along?"

"Mighty fine, I reckon," said Gloss, with a short laugh. "I've learnt that there ain't an implement I know how to handle right, and if there's a thing I thought I understood how to do from the time I was a young un, that thing's powerful certain to be done plumb wrong, and the first I've got to learn about it is how to forgit all I ever knowed."

Free Stanlin laughed.

"You'll do," he said. "You'll graduate with the highest honours if you keep on gaining knowledge at that pace."

From that dinner dated the anomaly of a friendship between Free Stanlin and a new student. In spite of appearances, however, the young men had something in common. The simple, whole-souled lad who had walked four hundred miles to acquire an education that should help to uplift his people, found in the ambitious young negro whose home lay barely a dozen miles from the school kindred aspirations. The friendship had robbed those early days at Tuskadela of much of their loneliness.

Gloss was thinking of Free Stanlin on this day when he watched the principal turn into his office. Here was a man of the negro race who had not to begin at the bottom, one who had surely not far to climb to stand even in the struggle whith the white men around him. Gloss Boyd already found himself looking upon Free as a representative man. If ignorance was keeping down the coloured people, here was one who was not ignorant. Honour and usefulness were surely before such a man, and he would be able to do much for his race.

As for the boy himself, he contributed his part to the advancement of the race by sitting down to wrestle with an arithmetical problem that occurred in his evening's lesson. He had ten minutes to spare before the supper bell would ring, and that problem, unsolved, and with little time to solve it, was heavy on his mind. The words of the principal rang in his ears. They stimulated him to effort. If Free Stanlin had not far to climb, the hill

of difficulty lay very steep before him. His brow drew together in a knotted pucker as he attacked the problem. He did not hear the door open, nor know that any one was in the room, until one of his roommates, with well-directed aim, struck that deep crease in his black brow with the corner of a closed envelope. Then the problem was forgotten, the brow cleared, and Gloss caught the missive before it fell.

It was the first letter he had received from Magnolia, and as he tore it open Tuskadela and all the unaccustomed routine were forgotten. He was back in Hebron with Magnolia and Uncle Pete, and the great educational institution of which he now formed a part had faded away. He did not know until he had read from the first word to the last of that letter, and the heart hunger that in these weeks had been getting a deeper and deeper hold of him was partially satisfied, how strong that hunger had been. The lines of care had gone from his face when he turned the letter over to read it through again. The struggle that was before him was for the time lost to view.

A good many minutes passed before his eye fell upon the book he had dropped when he caught the letter. The sight of that book brought him back to present surroundings, and the certainty that the supper bell had clanged out its message and relapsed into silence long ago. For a moment he listened, hoping to catch the sound of tramping feet that would testify that the last of the long string of boys and men passing from the dormitories to the dining hall had not yet disappeared, but a profound stillness reigned.

He caught up his cap and ran across the grounds, to find the dining-room door locked. He could hear the hum of voices within, and a sudden interest in that interior took possession of him. He knew enough of Tuskadela institutions, however, not to knock upon the door. Understanding that the meal was forfeited, he went back in leisurely fashion to read Magnolia's letter again

and grapple afresh with the difficulties of the night's studies.

The labours of the day had given him an appetite for supper rather than for study, but he stifled a few discontented pangs, and gave himself to the arithmetical puzzle. He had started out on this new life, and he would not even look back to the easier existence of Hebron. Already he appreciated the discipline that had resulted in orderly habits in these hundreds of boys and girls around him. None the less, however, he found the struggle hard.

## CHAPTER VIII.

For the twentieth time a square-built, motherly figure appeared in the doorway of a certain substantial farm dwelling, and for the twentieth time the woman shaded her eyes with her hand and looked long and anxiously up the road. The house was a large, square one, standing a little back from the plantation road, and looking out from under its piazza across broad fields on one side and the pink bloom of peach-trees on the other. In front it had a full view of the road, which passed it at a few yards' distance, going on by the farmyard, where a peacock strutted in all his pride, and a flock of geese hissed at the passers-by. It was a commodious house, and if its exterior was not quite as spick and span as a Northern home of the same rank, it was not neglected.

There was a look of expectancy on the face of the woman. That face, for all it was a black one, was distinctly interesting. Perhaps it was because there was a story written upon it, perhaps it was because the eyes had a yearning, mother look in them.

Betsey Stanlin was divided between solicitude and gladness. Care, stimulated by a turkey already passing the point of delicate brownness dear to the soul of a cook, was tugging at her heart strings, and joy, fresh upspringing, was responsible for that tremulous smile that hovered about her lips. Somewhere out on that road which stretched away in the distance was the boy for whom the feast was spread upon the very best tablecloth, and for whom the fatted turkey had yielded up his life. He should have been home long before now, this young man who was the only son of his mother, and for whom the best the plantation afforded would never be too good.

"He's a good boy, and always has been," murmured the woman, as she came once again to shade her eyes from the slanting sun and assure herself that the road was still empty. "He's been a good boy to his mother, and he'll sure be hungry after his long walk."

Then she hurried in to snatch another look at the fast-deepening brown of the turkey, and anxiety deepened in her eyes.

It was at the moment when a savory puff of hot air smote upon her face, and her eyes were engrossed with the contemplation of a fat turkey gobbler, that two travellers surmounted the diminutive hillock that preserved the plantation road from absolute flatness, and appeared upon the scene. The one, tall, well formed, with the easy swing of health—perfect if not robust—characterizing every movement, came on apace; the other, shorter and stouter, but with less exuberance in his movements, lagged somewhat at this, the end of the journey. It was Gloss Boyd's first holiday since he came to Tuskadela, and he was accompanying his friend Free Stanlin on his monthly visit to his home.

"Come with me; the change will do you good, and my mother will cosset you and lay siege to the intrenchments of that cough," Free had said. "We need not start till far on in the afternoon of Saturday. And by getting up a little earlier than usual we can be back by work time on Monday."

Gloss hesitated.

"You've got a fine home," he said. "I'm only a plantation hand."

"Shut up!" responded Free peremptorily. "I'll tell the mother to expect you. Why," he added, with a light laugh, "she'd mother the whole creation if I took an interest in it. Not but that you two will suit each other to perfection. She's as humble and modest as you are—and that isn't saying a little."

They had walked from Tuskadela, and Free was as

fresh at the journey's end as at the start. As for Gloss, he wondered how it was that twelve miles in this region seemed so much longer than twelve miles used to do around Hebron.

It was April now, and Gloss had been for more than three months at Tuskadela. He was as earnest in his pursuit of an education as he was on the day he entered. And he was making progress. But his cough had not left him, and he was getting accustomed to feeling tired. The feeling never for a moment lessened his energetic performance of all duties. To-day he was a trifle more tired than usual. He had been at work until twenty minutes before the start was made for Free Stanlin's home. He could not afford to lose time.

"Here we are," said Free, with a touch of pride in his tone.

It was something to be proud of, that plantation of six hundred acres, well cared for and entirely free from debt. Twenty-five years before, West Stanlin, the young man's father, had owned nothing but the clothes he stood upright in. He found the land too strait for him to-day, and the big, square house looked out toward a thousand acres of hired land in addition to his own.

An audible sigh escaped the lips of Gloss Boyd. He turned and looked at his friend. This was Free Stanlin's home, and Free was a black man.

He had never seen a black man who for worldly possessions could stand on a par with the best of the white men he had known. Gloss almost fancied that the problem of the races had been solved.

"You've got a start away up," he said. "You ought to climb high."

"There's climbing enough to do yet," responded Free.

Then he put his fingers to his lips and whistled. A turkey was being turned in its gravy when the first note of that whistle smote upon the ears of a black woman in the kitchen of the big, square house. That turkey went

ignominiously back into the oven, and Betsey Stanlin was standing on the doorstep to meet her boy when he came in at the gate.

"My chile!"

Her motherly arms went round him, and her kiss upon his cheek resounded pleasantly. "Ain't you near starved?" she demanded. "You're sure an hour late to-night."

Her eyes were travelling over him in anxious, motherly fashion.

"Go right in and we'll hev supper. The turkey's done brown," she said. "And you, chile," turning to Gloss, "make yourself at home. You're my Free's friend, and I'm proud to see you. Come in. If you ain't hungry you sure ought to be. Come in."

She trotted through the house to the back door.

"Father," she called, "you come right in to supper. They're here."

Almost before there had been time to respond to the summons, Gloss saw a stoutly built, elderly man, with a long white beard, ascending the steps that led to the back porch. The boy was not a very expert reader of character, but one glance at that strong, determined face told him how it had happened that West Stanlin had raised himself from the level of slavery to affluence. The man who welcomed Gloss had plodded steadily on through good fortune and ill fortune, taking the reverses as he took the successes, as but the stopping places for the next effort. West Stanlin had known what it was to be hungry. He had known what it was to put his year's labour into his crops and see all washed away by a prolonged storm, and to stand penniless, wondering how the next step was to be taken. But he had lived to see a good many of the finest acres he had ploughed as a slave added to his own plantation, and to give his son the best start in life that was available.

That supper was a revelation to Gloss Boyd of the possi-

bilities of a black man's success. With motherly Betsey Stanlin he felt at home from the first moment. She watched his plate as carefully as she did that of her own boy.

"He's got a lonesome look in his eyes," she confided to her husband later. "Lor, don't tell me boys ain't lonesome. I know better."

"So you're goin' to work your way through Tuskadela," remarked West Stanlin, when the meal was well advanced, and there had come a more healthy colour to Gloss Boyd's cheeks.

"Yes, sir," said Gloss. "It'll take a mighty long time, but I reckon it's worth it. I cert'nly want an education."

The old man nodded his head.

"Yes, yes," he said briskly. "Education won't do you any harm if you've got the grit in you. I ain't never had a smart sight, but I ain't altogether without any. What I got I give myself. But I ain't agin education. It's a right good tool in the hands of a workman. But it won't do the work for him. After all said and done, it's only a tool. The strong arm of the man, the sinew of his body, and the sinew of his brain, has got to hew out a road for him. Don't forget that."

"I ain't forgettin' it, sir," said Gloss. "I'm expectin' to work my way up a step at a time. I ain't like Free, a long way up to begin with."

West Stanlin cast a proud glance toward his boy.

"Oh, Free, he's one by himself," he said. "We're two old fools. We've got one chick between us, and we aim at makin' an eagle of it at the least."

Free laughed, but Gloss noticed how Betsey's eyes softened.

Before the meal was over Gloss felt himself imbued with a profound respect for West Stanlin. He was not alone in the feeling. There was a strength of character in the man that forced his fellows to respect him. He was not without the faults belonging to such a character,

however. A successful man rarely knows much of the grace of self-distrust. West Stanlin was a firm believer in the theory that success comes to the man who forces it, let him be black or white.

Betsey Stanlin shook her head when he inculcated his pet theory.

"If he's black he's got to be dreadful humble, father," she said, "or his success ain't goin' to be much good to him."

The old man's face darkened.

"I don't know as I've been anything but humble," he replied irritably. "I ain't altogether a fool, and I know I'm livin' among white men."

Betsey sighed.

"I don't know as they don't feel as much respect for me as if I had a white skin," he added after a moment's silence. "They'll take my opinion about the yield of cotton a long sight before they will their own."

"Because there isn't a better, and they know it," laughed Free. "Gloss, if you don't feel like picking any more turkey bones, come over and see the place. You're an agriculturist now, and are bound to take an interest in pigs and poultry."

It was late in the evening, when Free had gone off somewhere with his father, that Gloss wandered back to the house. There were so many thoughts stirring in his mind that he was not sorry to be alone. He found his way into the sitting-room, where Betsey had lighted a fire on the hearth, and drew up his chair to the blaze. From the day when he lay for hours trembling in a swamp, listening to the cries of dogs, and wondering how much his life was worth, he had felt that, let him try as hard as he would, the odds were strongly against a black man. To-night he was inclined to alter his opinion.

He was staring into the glowing embers, thinking of Free Stanlin and his future, and enjoying the rest and

stillness of this evening hour, so strong a contrast to the pushing activity of Tuskadela, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Honey, it's toilsome work, climbin'. *I* know. I've done gone through it all."

He looked up into Betsey Stanlin's friendly face.

"Free told me you began at the bottom," he said.

"Chile, if there was a place lower than the bottom, that was where we was, she said. "Me and West has clumb up every step of the way by main force. We didn't never know what it was to set down and rest, or to stop to see how fur we'd clumb. 'You he'p me to get a home, and then you may set down and rest jest as long as you like,' he said. And we went right at it. I used to go outer my yard in the mornin' when it was so dark you couldn't see whether I was a man or a woman. I never seed my back yard by daylight only a-Sundays. I'd go out in the dark, and come in when it was dark agin. I washed at night, and scoured at night, and cooked at night. And when the hour to turn out come afresh, I've many a time been layin' right on my floor afore the fire, too dead tired to go to bed. Climbin's mighty toilsome work, honey."

He looked at her with appreciation in his eyes.

"We've got to do it, if we ain't goin' to be low down for ever," he said, and his words ended in a short, sharp cough.

"I'm goin' right off to fix somethin' for that cough," said Betsey. "That ain't goin' to be no help in the climbin'."

Her hand went back to his shoulder, and she stood looking down at him.

"You're my Free's friend," she said, "and that makes you sorter belong to me. Honey, I'se gone through so much myself, I want to save my boy from hevin' to go through it, and I love everybody that loves him."

Her voice had taken a tone of passionate earnestness.

"You were born in slavery times," said Gloss.

"I was raised right up and down the cotton row," she said. "Honey, I drinked the cup o' lonesomeness clear down to the bottom. I don't want my Free ever to get it to his lips. I was a little black nigger, and a homely one at that, and I reckon them white people thought I hadn't no right to feelin's. Chile, I thought I should 'a died of sorrer. I nearly grieved myself to death bein' separated from my mother and my sisters. Honey, there ain't no pain o' the body that hurts like a real draggin' heartache."

Something in his eyes responded to that last remark, and she continued:

"I wasn't a day over twelve years old when they brought me down to Alabama. Me and mother and the rest had lived at Charlestown. Her white people was all dead but the young miss, and she was a girl at school. She allowed my mother half of what she earned to bring up her children. I tell you mother was no idler. She washed for the white people. But the guardian who managed the business for the young missis sent the speculator one day, and he huddled us all into his van and drove us to his yard. My mother had no time only to gather up a bundle of things. They kept us in the van all night, and next day put us on the train. The rest was sold at different places, but they brought me on here. I never see my mother no more."

Her hand dropped from Gloss Boyd's shoulder. She stood looking into the fire.

"Yes, I know plumb well what it is to be lonesome," she said, "and what it is to feel you ain't got no place in the world. When years later I come to see for the first time the precious, tiny face of my baby chile, I raised right up and vowed he should never know how lonesome and despairin' it could be to be a nigger. Bless him! I called him Free, because freedom had come then, and a black man was an American citizen in exactly the same sense as a white man. Free! It's a blessed name.

Chile, it's only them that's knowed what it was to be nder the feet of men that understands what it means to e free. I meant my boy should one day stand up and e a man—and a nigger hadn't never been able to be that p to them times. But now we was free. The world as in front of us, and my boy had the same chance that a white woman's baby had. I lifted up my hands and thanked God my boy was born in this land of America that had declared all men in it should be free alike, and hev the same rights. Honey, my heart leaped right up. I'd given birth to a free child."

"I didn't know how he come by his name," said Gloss.

"That was how," replied Betsey. "And I never call him by it without thinkin' what that name means. I'm lookin' to see what he'll turn out. Honey, I ain't never let no evil come nigh him. I'se watched over him as if he'd been a girl. There's them that think a taste of evil don't hurt a boy. I ain't of that way o' thinkin'. I brought a man child into the world, and I'se give him to the world and to our people. Every good man of our race is helpin' that race up. I'd rather he'd be good than anything else. And he is. I'm lookin' for what work the Master in heaven has got for Free to do. He's a good boy, if I *do* say it, and there ain't nobody got a better reason to know. He's never been out o' my sight for long together, and I reckon there ain't much he don't tell his mammy."

She laughed, but Gloss was not deceived into overlooking the sob that was choked in the laugh.

"If I stand here chatterin' there won't never be nothin' fixed for that cough," she said.

## CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT'S grievin' you, honey?"

Free Stanlin did not know how long he had been glaring at a certain headline of an old newspaper, nor how expressive his face was upon occasion. At last, however, the earnest, wistful gaze fixed upon him had drawn his eyes from the torn and soiled paper, and then the question came.

"Nothing, mother, only"—and a smile half deprecatory came to the young man's lips—"only the same old thing."

Betsey Stanlin shook her head.

"My chile," she said, "the negro people has more need of the grace of patience than any other people in this America. They surely has. It ain't a mite o' good kickin' agin it, honey. We'se on this earth, and we ain't in glory, and this world, chile, sure ain't the birth home of real just thinkin' and dealin'. Lor, people talk about justice as if it lived right down among the people o' this earth. It ain't nothin' but the shadder of it that's ever got as low down as under the sun. How's it goin' to live here, honey, when people's feelin's makes all the difference in the world to their judgment, and there's nothin' but their judgment to guide their doin' and sayin'? Chile, if I was judgin' betwixt what you done and what some other woman's boy done, do you think I could see right straight and true? America, chile, is the great mother of the white people that has their habitations around and about us, an' it ain't to be expected she can judge plumb without respect o' persons between her children and our people. I might be aimin' at justice real earnest, honey, but there'd be hundreds o' little ways where

I'd favour you. What's that paper got in to grieve you?"

He pointed to the headline.

"Lamentable failure of higher education among the negro race. A well-known friend of the negro declares the scheme of higher education a failure in so far as raising the black man is concerned."

"Take that in the light of Gloss Boyd," he said. "He's struggling after an education higher than can be had in the country schools. Is that struggle a failure? Is the boy who has the courage to make that struggle a failure, even though he should never attain to what the writer of that article would call a high state of development?"

"No, honey, that boy ain't no failure, 'ceptin' it be in the way of health," said Betsey emphatically. "I don't like the look of that chile's face. I ain't wantin' to see you look like that, honey. But outside of real stoutness, Gloss Boyd ain't no failure. I don't know as he could be more in earnest if he was white."

Free laughed, but the laugh was a mirthless one.

"They look back," he said, "the white people of this land look back with respect to the log cabins whence the best and sturdiest of their race fought their way to school and college. They like to tell how these men denied themselves to gain an education. Very good. Our boys are doing the same—here one and there one. Tuskadela is always full, and Tuskadela for a boy who has never known discipline is no easy road to success. It is true that education there is free, but everything but the education must be paid for with labour. There is not a pencil he uses, nor a book he studies, that the student does not have to work for. If sickness comes to him, he pays for the doctor and the nurse. Tuskadela does not lift the burden of his maintenance from his shoulders. It requires of him all the effort he can put forth, and the education he gains there is not the education of idleness.

And yet the place is full, and a hundred such institutions could be filled to-morrow. And they tell us that we fail to appreciate education."

"There ain't no need to believe *all* you're told, honey," interposed Betsey.

Free laughed, and this time the laugh had a softer note in it.

"You don't preach without practising, mother," he said. "If all of us could have your patience—"

"You can't, chile," she said. "You're young and strong, and hev lots of your own will. You better throw such printin' as that in the fire, honey. When you ain't lookin' at it you ain't thinkin' about it."

"I reckon it's printed inside me," said Free. "Patience don't come by not thinking."

"Thinking about what?"

It was Gloss Boyd who asked the question. He had come in as Free spoke.

"That," said Free, holding the paper out to him.

Gloss shook his head.

"I ain't had no higher education yet," he said, "so I don't know much about it. The lower's enough for me."

Free stood with the paper still in his hand. His usually dreamy eyes had a light in them.

"The white men ask, as if the question were already answered, 'What has education done for the negro?'" he said. "What has it done? It has set thousands of us struggling to get more of it. It is working like leaven among us, but in comparison with the whole lump it is only a little leaven yet. What has education done? It hasn't worked miracles, but it has worked changes. They call higher education a failure because, with a few of the best of schools scattered like distant lights here and there among our millions of people, we have not all been illumined. They look at the men and women of our people whom the education has never touched, and say 'What has it done?'"

"It's done something for you," said Gloss proudly.

Free smiled.

"You and mother are alike," he said. "You are too humble by half."

Betsey turned in the doorway to shake her head slowly.

"It's safer to be humble, honey," she said, "a heap safer."

"We've got to be everything or else we're nothing," continued Free. "When people from a distance come South, the Southern white men take them to the slums of the cities and show them the lowest negro quarters. 'Where are the results of the educational efforts put forth in behalf of the negro?' they ask. Did anybody ever expect to find those results there? It is not in the slums that the men who have profited by education are to be found. Do people take their friends to the slums where the submerged tenth among the whites live to give them a general view of the American race?" he added hotly. "It is true that with us the better class is the exception, and with the whites the rule, but what then? They have had three hundred years of prosperity in this country in which to perfect their own enlightenment, and they were away up when they began. We have had less than forty years to rise from slavery. Judge any people by the rules by which they judge us—ask any race to leap from the lowest depth to the height of civilisation in thirty-odd years, and, let that race be black or white, it will fail to come up to the demand. We are not what we want to be, we are not what we shall be in another thirty years, but we are not a failure, or—men like my father could not be found."

His voice dropped; his face softened. He was looking across the peach blooms to where a white head could be seen moving across the field. West Stanlin was one of the best arguments on the negro side of the controversy. The old man, hard-headed, strong-willed, judicious, a first-class farmer, the master and leader of

two hundred farm workers, was a living witness of the power of the negro to stand a man among men. It was of West Stanlin that a white planter one day remarked, "If that man wasn't a nigger he'd be as fine a specimen of a self-made American as you'd find in the breadth of a State."

"I should think you'd be that mighty proud of him, you wouldn't know where you was."

Gloss was still looking at the white head on the further side of the peach-trees.

Free's eyes dropped to his friend's face. There had come a light into them.

"When I see him in the place he has made for himself," he said, "I feel like laughing at the hot feeling inside me. What does it matter what they say or think? It does not put him out of that place, or make him other than what he is."

Argue as he would, however, it had always mattered to Free Stanlin that in the estimation of the white people around him he was, and must ever be, essentially inferior. To the lowest in the community the question of status is an unimportant one. It is the man of character, the man with the stirrings of strength in him, who has surmounted difficulties and feels within himself the power to surmount more, who resents the "So far shalt thou come, and no further." To Free Stanlin the restrictions placed around the negro, as if he were a distinctly inferior and decidedly loathsome animal, were galling. He had no desire to intrude himself upon the white people of his neighbourhood, but he could not see why, in the ordinary transactions of life, he had not a right to the same courtesy at their hands that he was willing on every occasion to accord to them. It would have been pleasanter to have been made white, since his lot was cast in a white community, but he argued that, the opinion of white people notwithstanding, colour did not make the man, and insult to a man because his skin was black was an insult to hu-

manity as surely as if it had been offered to a white-skinned representative of the human race.

He was not inclined to ask that racial distinctions should be set aside so that there should be a complete intermingling of the two peoples. He had his own ideas as to the desirability of such a course either for the negro or the white man. What he asked was a community of rights, a dropping of all arrogant claims to superiority, and a free fight for life and its privileges. If the white man was superior, so much the better for him in the struggle, and so much the less reason that he should desire to handicap his weaker rival either socially, politically, or commercially. He knew many white men who were obviously his own inferiors. He was not careful to assert the fact, however.

Perhaps, on the whole, as Betsey Stanlin said, the young man lacked humility.

And yet there was a certain proud humility about him, or he would not have kept so carefully closed a door that opened from his own bedroom. It was only a little bit of a place, that room beyond; but his hands had fashioned in the ceiling of it a very serviceable skylight. The tiny den would not have vexed the soul of an artist, though it lacked most of the paraphernalia of a studio. The picture on an easel drawn where the light fell critically upon it would have forbidden any artist to indulge in mirth at the expense of that little room. The canvas showed nothing but a straggling clump of rose-bushes, in radiant bloom, but the fingers that had handled the brush had possessed the art of putting life into each branch and bud. There were amateur touches everywhere, yet the canvas bore, not simply a pictured rose-bush, but a tangle of roses that made the spectator catch his breath and fancy that the scent of flowers filled the room. It was undoubtedly the effort of a young artist, but not all young artists are careful to keep the door closed on their productions.

By a mere chance, Gloss Boyd, burdened with a mes-

sage from Betsey Stanlin, pushed open that door because he heard his friend's footstep inside. Then he stood upon the threshold breathless with astonishment.

For the time Free had forgotten the presence of Gloss in the house. He was apt to forget, when he shut himself in here, that the world was going on outside as usual. He was touching up an imperfect petal, and he did not hear Gloss enter. The dark, intellectual face wore a look Gloss had not seen there before. Free Stanlin found in his scientific studies a delight. He put all his brain into his work in that direction, but he put his soul into his painting.

"Free Stanlin, I thought I knew what you were made of till I come to your house. I didn't know a thing."

Free turned sharply. The engrossed look left his face. He felt the warm blood mount to it.

"You weren't meant to know this," he said.

Gloss stared.

"You ain't ashamed of it—that's sure," he said. "And it's powerful unlike you to be stingy."

The half-formed frown died away. About Free's lips came the glimmer of a smile.

"A man may have his weaknesses, but there's no necessity to expose them to the world," he said.

"*That* ain't a weakness."

"It is for a nigger."

The intonation of the last word made it expressive.

Gloss came a step further into the room.

"Free Stanlin, if I'd got all you have, I wouldn't think whether I was a nigger or not. I'd enjoy it," he said. "I ain't expectin' to get up more'n a little way. You'll always be heights above me, but when I can do something, I won't ask who's above me, nor how far they're above. I'll be proud enough if I can reach down and help some of our people up. You can do that now. You've helped me a mighty sight, and I don't see why you should grudge

lettin' me see them roses. They ain't jest common, and you know it."

There was no trace of the frown on Free's face now. Something like shame had taken its place.

"What a fellow you are," he said. "Come in and look. I've got some more here. They have lots of faults in them, I know. Some day, perhaps—"

He broke off, and turned a canvas that had its face to the wall. He did not find it easy to speak about the aspirations that he none the less secretly cherished.

There was something in Gloss Boyd that put to shame the sore pride which made him chafe, not at the fate that had decreed he should be a negro, but at the position in which, as a negro, he was placed. In the presence of Gloss Boyd, as in the presence of his mother, it seemed of more importance to be something than to be acknowledged to be something, and the barriers put before the progress of the negro looked of less consequence than the spirit with which the negro met the difficulties that surrounded him. To-day he fell to showing Gloss his pictures, and the result was that Betsey Stanlin's message went forever undelivered.

## CHAPTER X.

"Come here, Esther, child. Never mind the finery now."

The big, old-fashioned arm-chair made the speaker look more diminutive than nature intended, and the big, old-time square room of which the arm-chair formed a part of the furnishing accentuated the effect. Everything in that room was strong, and old, and massive, everything but the small, delicately formed lady in the arm-chair by the long window. The room, dating far enough in the past to be history haunted, with its pieces of solid furniture, about every one of which a story clung, was imposing in its substantial respectability. Nevertheless, so long as the sunlight fell on the oval face of the woman sitting by the window, the room and its past sank into insignificance except as a setting for the patrician lady upon whom had devolved the duty of upholding the dignity, if not the wealth, of the Ross family.

The wealth had become a tradition of the past. The old name remained, and there was none that stood higher; but the riches that had made it a power had been swept away. The "old Ross place" had stretched away for miles. Cuthbert Ross, the present representative of the family, called but a comparatively small proportion of those acres his own. The war that had washed away a nation's stain in that nation's own blood had left Cuthbert Ross a poor man. But the name of Ross stood as high to-day as when it had behind it the force of wealth, and the little woman who ruled over the house of Cuthbert Ross ruled with as absolute a sway as did any in the old days.

After her call there was a minute's silence. Then the door opened and Esther Ross entered.

"Child, there are but two more days in which I can call you my own. Come. Your old place will soon miss you."

The words, half imperious, half regretful, greeted the girl. Esther crossed the room quickly, drew a footstool beneath the window, and sat down, her hand resting lightly upon her mother's knee. The proud face was not quite as self-possessed as usual. Mrs. Ross looked into it questioningly.

"Franklin Heathcote was here an hour ago," she said, watching the colour rise into the girl's cheeks. "He was disappointed that you were away. I told him that he must put up with me instead, but he need not grumble, for he would soon have the ordering of your coming and going."

The rosy flush deepened on Esther's cheek.

"The promise was a little rash," she said.

Mrs. Ross laughed.

"He made me the pretty answer that your going would be powerless to deprive him of his gladness then, for he should have the right to go with you."

The girl did not answer. She was looking up through the open window, but the tender gladness that shone in her eyes did not escape the keen gaze of Mrs. Ross. There was silence between them for a time. Esther's eyes were still fixed upon the scene without. Mrs. Ross was looking at her daughter.

"There is but one fault to find with the business," said that lady at last. "Franklin is as poor as the rest of us."

Esther's gaze came back quickly.

"If he were otherwise it would be a greater objection," she said. "I am not in the habit of taking more than I can give."

"Little danger of that when you give yourself," said Mrs. Ross. "Child, the man who gets you will always be on the debtor's side of the bargain, let him be ever so rich, which Franklin Heathcote is not. On the whole

you will be a little poorer in your new home than you were in the old."

"If you count wealth in dollars—yes," said Esther quietly.

That she did not thus count it was attested by the light of happiness on the girl's face. It was no less proud than on the day that she walked in the woods with Marie Renshaw, but happiness had softened the outward evidence of the pride. The bride that Franklin Heathcote was to claim in two days might be as imperious as ever with the rest of the world, but where he was concerned she had laid down her arms. The young Southerner accounted himself a lucky man, and he was not far wrong.

"Did you see Marie Renshaw in town?"

Esther's eyes returned from another excursion to the garden, and a glimmer of mirth awoke in them.

"Yes," she said. "She went with me to see how the dress fitted, with the result that she nearly sent the whole establishment into a fit with her criticisms. Amongst other objections she is afraid that with my inches I shall look uncomfortably tall in such long, straight folds."

The laugh that came with the words had no malice in it, whatever might have been the case with the original criticism.

Mrs. Ross smiled.

"Marie is small enough and charming enough to represent the diminutive style of beauty," she replied. "Your long folds will become you better than her furbelows, pretty though they may be."

This was what she said aloud. To herself she added: "The little coquette is malicious. Ah, well, it goes a trifle hard with her that Franklin Heathcote passed over the colour and glitter of a false stone to choose a genuine pearl. She had brave hopes of figuring as bride instead of bridesmaid when Franklin led his lady love to the altar. However, I'm glad it is as it is, for the child loves him."

Of the truth of the latter proposition there could be no doubt. Esther Ross was not a girl to give away her heart lightly, but she had given it very unreservedly to Franklin Heathcote. The fact was presumptive evidence that the young man deserved the gift. He was very eager to possess it.

"I am not a rich man, but I have a good home to offer her, and if love can make up for the absence of wealth, she shall never miss the riches," he said, when he came to Cuthbert Ross to prefer a request that he knew was a bold one. "You may think me presumptuous, for I am a comparative stranger to you. But if I wait till you know me better, some one else may snap up the prize."

"Very likely, very likely," said Mr. Ross. "As to knowing you, my boy, you've been among us for something like twelve months, and I've nothing to say against you. I knew your uncle, and a better man and better neighbour I do not expect to see."

Franklin Heathcote blessed the memory of his deceased relative at that moment.

"I know I am asking much, sir," he began.

"Asking much?" interrupted Mr. Ross. "Of course you are. But if you were not bold enough to ask it, some other youngster would, and he might be worse. I'd keep my girl always if I could. She's all I have. But, bless you, some upstart of a boy would step in and frustrate all my plans. I may as well give her to you as to anybody else."

A smile, half cynical, half kindly, played about his lips as he spoke. Cuthbert Ross had a liking for this young man, the nephew and heir of an old friend and neighbouring planter.

"Better, sir," said Franklin quickly. "For I'll swear that nobody could quite as well appreciate the gift."

"Don't be too sure, young man," was the reply. "I venture to say there's more than one who would smile upon me as sweetly as yourself if I'd give him Esther."

Franklin laughed.

"Very likely. But it is too late now," he said. "You have given her to me. I won't try to thank you. I couldn't."

"That's all right, my boy," said Cuthbert Ross. "You shouldn't have her if I did not think you would make her happy."

The young man's head was almost turned with the greatness of his good fortune. And when he crowned his happiness by winning a promise from Esther's own lips, he accounted himself the happiest man in the State of Alabama.

From the time when his uncle's death left him in possession of a plantation that was neither large nor particularly profitable, he had been attracted toward this girl. Her proud reserve delighted his fastidious taste. There was not a home in the neighbourhood that was not open to him. More than one heart besides that of Marie Renshaw beat a little more quickly at his approach. But it was when he succeeded in bringing the light of animation into the face of Esther Ross that he accounted he had won his greatest triumph, and on the very rare occasions when he saw the rich blood rise to her cheek he found his own pulses stirring with unwonted quickness. And now, at last, Esther the proud, Esther the unapproachable, was his. No wonder he was glad.

As for the girl herself, she was sometimes half afraid of the happiness that had come to her. It was a joy so completely out of her own keeping that it brought with it a feeling of unrest. She no longer possessed the key of her own heart. Life had suddenly broadened out into possibilities of gladness before undreamed of, but the vista was vague. Sorrow as well as joy might be lurking in that opening future, for with the room for joy came also the room for pain. Already the honour of Franklin Heathcote had become as dear to her as her own. Any defection on his part was capable of touching her as keenly as

if she herself were wanting. The perfection of his manhood was the perfection of her own life. For the love that had taken hold of her heart possessed it very fully, and brought with it the results which were natural to one of Esther's temperament. She was very happy, but she took her new happiness with a measure of fear.

Not so Franklin Heathcote. He set himself diligently to prepare a home for his bride. There was nothing too good for Esther, and with regard to expense—well, a man did not take a wife every day in the year. Such a girl as Esther could not be set down in surroundings which were possibly well fitted for the worthy women his predecessors had installed in that home, but which looked sordid and mean when viewed in connection with the bride he was so soon to bring hither. So workmen came from the nearest town, and alterations went on apace.

Esther loved flowers, therefore a conservatory that Marie Renshaw pronounced a "little gem" rose at the end of the house. Marie's heart grew hot with jealousy in those days. She made her friendship for Esther an excuse for numerous visits to the house that was to be Esther's home, but it was noticeable that her temper was never materially improved by the excursions. Not but that it was a pleasant five miles of road that lay between the Renshaw house and Franklin Heathcote's plantation. The road was in good condition, and Marie was a good horsewoman, yet she usually returned from such a trip with an increased tendency to snub her brother Ted, and a tongue sharper than usual to descant on the delinquencies of the negro servant who waited upon her.

"Miss Marie's dreffful cross like jest now. She surely am," that damsel declared in confidence to the cook.

"There's more'n one bit by that maggot," responded that authority. "Mr. Ted's mad enough to gnaw his own nose off. If that Franklin Heathcote was a darky, I wouldn't give much for his skin. The young master would sure find some pretext for putting a hole through

it. But it ain't jest safe to fool with Mr. Heathcote. Neversomeless, the young master ain't a-goin' to forgive him easy for carryin' off Miss Esther. He sure ain't."

All of which went to shew that if Esther Ross and Franklin Heathcote were satisfied with the trend of events, all the world did not share their satisfaction.

When it came to parting with her daughter, Mrs. Ross had one consolation. The new home was but a short distance from the old. Barely a mile intervened between the "Ross place" and West Stanlin's plantation, and Franklin's cotton fields adjoined those of the coloured planter. Motherly Mrs. Stanlin would be Esther's next-door neighbour, though the houses were some distance apart. That circumstance awakened Marie Renshaw's commiseration.

"I really pity you for having to put up with those niggers," she remarked, in a tone of condolence. "It would take away all the pleasure of my life to have those darkies putting on airs right on my very borders."

Esther smiled.

"My comfort is not so completely at other people's mercy," she said. "And in my case we shall not be near enough to trouble each other much. If it come to that, I hope they won't object to me. I am the interloper, you see, by reason of coming last."

This with a quizzical smile.

It was Mrs. Ross who took up the word.

"The Stanlins are very respectable and well behaved," she said. "Betsey Stanlin is as humble as if she lived in the good old days. I apprehend no trouble for Esther there, though I agree with you, Marie, my dear, that there is a certain disagreeableness in having such people living near you in circumstances that might lead them to put on airs and claim a measure of social equality. There's no fear with the Stanlins, however. They know their place."

"West Stanlin's place is a fairly good one," said Esther quietly. "I am not sure it is not higher than my own.

The fact that he earned it all himself should certainly be taken into consideration when these hard-and-fast places are meted out."

"My dear, you are foolishly rash," said Mrs. Ross, reprovingly. "I hope Franklin will set himself to modify these absurd notions of yours. You are always losing sight of the essential fitness of things. These people are all very well in their place. I have the greatest respect for West Stanlin as a farmer. He knows his business. But he is a nigger, and always will be."

"Exactly so," said Esther. "Why should he be anything else? He is a man, every inch of him, and a man to be respected."

"I don't know that there's much to be said against West Stanlin," replied Marie. "But his son is an upstart. I've no patience with such darkies. I verily believe he has aspirations toward being considered a gentleman."

"Why not?" asked Esther. "Aspirations are healthy. Free Stanlin has been educated so that he may begin where his father leaves off. Are negro and gentleman conflicting terms, if the negro possess education and refinement?"

"Most assuredly they are conflicting terms," said Mrs. Ross. "And those two things—education and refinement—he will never possess. The negro can ape the manners of the white man, but refinement is contrary to his nature."

"There I disagree," said Esther. "I do not claim that the article is yet to be found in its fullest completeness, but I deny the impossibility of its existence. To assert that is to restrict the powers of human nature. I may not have reached to the highest possibilities of womanhood, but I deny to any the right to say that I cannot rise higher."

"You are not a nigger, child, and you do not know what a nigger is," said Mrs. Ross.

"Nor what he may become," retorted Esther.

Mrs. Ross shook her head. "You are young," she said.

"You will learn better as you grow older. I know the niggers better than you do, and I say that they can go to a certain point, but beyond that all is imitation. I have had a lifelong acquaintance with them."

"In slavery, yes," said Esther. "But the most zealous advocate of the good old times will not deny that those conditions were not calculated to raise the negro beyond this certain point of which you speak. You acknowledge that he rose to that point. It was the highest point allowed to him. And you deny the possibility of a further ascent under more favourable conditions."

"Show me one who has risen further," demanded Mrs. Ross.

"West Stanlin," replied her daughter. "He has risen to the limit of his advantages. With increased advantages, why should not the next generation rise higher?"

"You are indulging in visions, my child. You do not know what you are talking about," said Mrs. Ross, in a tone that in itself concluded the argument. "Educate a negro as you will, and the negro character remains, and always will remain, no matter what his advantages. And a nigger can never be a gentleman."

## CHAPTER XI.

"I RECKON I've done come to the end, and there'll be no lendin' a helpin' hand to anybody."

Gloss Boyd raised himself in bed and looked round the little hospital room. He was its sole occupant. His eyes had in them a depth of pain that did not all come from that tight, hard ache in his chest.

"I thought I could fight through it. I sure did. But I can't. It's beatin' me."

His eyes travelled round the room helplessly.

"It's jest failin', to die now, when I ain't accomplished anything."

The troubled look grew more intense. His hands clenched themselves tightly. For a long time the room was very still.

"I was wantin' to do so much."

The words came painfully. There was in them the ring of despair. The boy who had walked four hundred miles to secure an education, and fought through the loneliness and strangeness of a new life, had come to a fresh battle. And the enemy was stronger than he.

For many hours there had been growing upon him the conviction that the end would be defeat. It came as a surprise. Until now the difficulties he had met had only made him more determined to secure the education he had come in search of. He had begun very thoroughly to appreciate the agricultural training he was receiving. He saw in it a means of advancement. He was glad he had chosen to learn agriculture rather than a trade. It would be more useful to him in Hebron, when he returned to carry out his plans. He could support himself well while he won a hearing from his old friends and neighbours.

In the strength of this hope he had battled against the weariness which had become habitual. He was accustomed now to going tired to bed and getting up with limbs aching and head heavy when the rising bell roused him. His cough made the nights restless. It had grown worse instead of better. Since the night when he crept out of the swamp with his soaked clothing hanging a dead, chill weight upon him, that cough had been a constant companion.

He never dreamed of complaining of it, or of anything else. His one thought was to secure an education and go back to the people in Hebron, and to Magnolia. He had never expected to find the task easy. It worried him that his ignorance must put off the consummation longer than he had had supposed. But it would come. It *must* come, for he would never give up till he had won. And now it had come to him as an overwhelming surprise that the fight was almost over, and that the victory was not to be on his side.

All night he had refused to believe it. He had been in the hospital but three days. It was premature to judge of the issue. Why should not this weakness and pain yield to the doctor's treatment? But with the morning light the conviction had forced itself upon him that he should never see Hebron again—nor Magnolia. He had said a last good-bye to the girl out there on the road beyond the hamlet.

It was this conviction that brought the helpless longing into his eyes as they wandered back and forth across the room, as if somewhere they might find a reversal of the sentence of death that he felt within him. Presently the door opened, and the doctor came in. At once the eyes grew sharp with anxiety.

"Doctor, I can sure bear to hear the truth. Shall I ever go back to them that's waitin' for me?"

The words came sharp and shrill, with a gasp of pain at the end. They greeted the doctor before the doorstep

was passed. Their suddenness won for them an answer. If he had had time to think, the man who entered might have been less frank.

"No."

The eyes of doctor and patient met. Gloss Boyd was answered.

"This has been going on for months. The present attack of pneumonia might, if there had been no previous weakness, have worn itself out," explained the doctor. "As it is, you have no power of resistance. It's no use deceiving you. There is hardly a chance that you will throw it off."

"I don't want to be deceived, sir," said Gloss. "I'd a sight rather know."

And then the nurse came in, and the doctor gave directions about treatment, and departed.

The conviction had become a certainty. The struggle for an education was ended, and the dreams of success were gone. Gloss Boyd knew now that he should never shew the people of Hebron a better way.

He lay back passive and still, while the hopes that had kept guard against discouragement vanished like a troop of ghosts, and left the bare fact of defeat behind.

Tuskadela, which had so long been to him a dream of the future, had become a dream of the past. It was strange how in these three days the bustle and stir of the institution had slipped out of his life. The little hospital outside the grounds was within hearing of all the bells—those clanging messengers that had mapped out his days with such arbitrary exactness. But the effort and the struggle passed by that small building, and Gloss felt that he had already dropped out of the Tuskadela routine. He knew now that he should never enter it again.

He had refused to stand aside until the last moment. Long after every breath he drew was a sharp pain, he had kept at work in the field and the schoolroom. He could not afford to give in. Absence from the ranks of the

workers meant loss of pay, and illness entailed hospital treatment with its attendant expenses. He hurried from farm work to study, setting his teeth together when the pain grew more severe. He had dropped neither hoe nor book so long as he could hold either. Both fell at last from his shaking fingers, and he was sent from the schoolroom to the doctor, and from the doctor to the hospital. And then he gave up the struggle, or rather he exchanged it for a struggle with pain.

He was not giving conscious thought to the pain now, though it brought the hot drops to his forehead. He was thinking of Magnolia, the baby sister of his earliest years, the pride of his heart to-day. He had been planning a changed future for Magnolia. The world had widened much for him since he came to Tuskadela. There had been revealed possibilities before undreamed of. They had given him new ideas for his sister. When the first difficulties were overcome, and he grew skilful enough to earn more money, might he not save sufficient to pay for her journeying hither? There were girls at Tuskadela who had become clever workwomen at different crafts. Why not Magnolia? With pride he told himself there was none superior to his sister in all that institution.

It was not with her as it was with him. Learning came easy to Magnolia. She might be milliner, dressmaker, nurse, or whatever else she pleased. She would be sure to excel in anything she took up, whether it were done with the head or the hands. As to book learning, she had always been ahead of him. She would grapple easily with the studies that he found too hard for his weary brain. He had begun to comfort himself in view of his own failures with the prospect of her success. His heart bounded at the glorious possibility of having her with him. He wanted all Tuskadela to see her.

It was only in his last letter that he had dared to tell her of his hopes. He had refrained from mentioning them before, lest he should not be able to turn them

into facts. She had answered with some lively criticisms on the project in the language in which they fell from the lips of Uncle Pete. It was one thing to let a boy go out into the world, and quite another to turn his little girl adrift. He was not going to part with Magnolia in a hurry, the old man declared.

In spite of the lightness with which she touched upon it, however, Gloss knew by the tone of her letter how the prospect had stirred his sister. He did not need to be told how she looked when she read his proposal. He could see her as plainly as if he had been there, with her head lifted high and her eyes looking straight before her. Just so he had often seen her stand when something pleased and excited her.

She would never come to Tuskadela now, and he should never look into that bright, brave face again.

The possibility of leaving Magnolia to meet the world alone had not once occurred to Gloss. He had from the beginning stood between her and the roughest side of life, and he had no thought but to stand in such position always. It seemed to him that to die was a cowardly giving up of the battle.

The sense of failure was strong, because it involved Magnolia. He was not looking at death from his own side. It was the way in which it would affect Magnolia that gave to it its overwhelming terror.

"Why, what's this? Giving in? That' s not Gloss Boyd."

Free Stanlin had crossed the room far enough to see plainly the nerveless hand and the face lying motionless upon the pillow. Something in the attitude, in the absence of struggle, the manifest acceptance of each moment's pain as it came, told him that Gloss Boyd had given up the fight.

"There's no more use fightin'. I shall never get an education, nor reach down a helpin' hand to anybody."

"Why not?"

"I've done got to die."

The words went with a sharp stab straight to the heart of Free Stanlin.

"Nonsense! You're weak and fanciful. You've got too much to do to die."

"That's it." The head upon the pillow lifted itself quickly. "I've sure got a life's work. And I ain't got the life."

The head fell back wearily.

"How do you know?" demanded Free.

"The doctor said so."

"The idiot!"

Free Stanlin felt it imperative to rail at somebody. The fiat was preposterous. After all the boy had done, such an outcome was not to be credited.

"I reckon he knows. I was mighty nigh sure before he said it."

"You'd no right to be sure. See here, Gloss, I can't spare you."

It had come home to Free Stanlin in the moments of silence, that Tuskadela without this boy from Hebron would be an empty place for him. In all his life before Free had never had a chum. The straightforward simplicity of Gloss Boyd had won him from the beginning. The dull ache of his heart to-day told him that he loved the boy who lay looking with wistful eyes into his face.

"It don't make no difference whether a man can be spared or not when he's got to die. *I* sure can't be spared nohow."

He was thinking of Magnolia.

Free frowned, and while the frown was yet on his face the door opened.

"Look here, Free Stanlin, this won't do. It's not good for him to talk. You'd better go away and let him sleep."

The nurse crossed the room with authoritative step as she spoke. Free looked at her defiantly.

"You're all of you doing him a lot more harm than I am," he said sharply. "Sick men don't thrive on doctors' reports."

The placid smile on the nurse's face irritated him. He felt like quarrelling with all the world.

"It don't hurt to talk. There won't anything make any difference now," said Gloss weakly. "I cert'nly don't feel like sleepin'."

Nevertheless the nurse routed out the intruder, and Free departed to find the doctor and argue against the verdict that touched him too nearly to be accepted without a protest.

After all it was not the doctor who convinced him. The rapid development of disease in a few hours made every friend of Gloss Boyd conscious of the fact that for him the graduating day was near, and school life almost done.

It was on the evening of the day on which Gloss asked a plain question and received a plain answer that Free Stanlin stood by the principal's desk.

"I shall do no good at either study or work while he is lying there, sir," he said.

The principal looked up at the young man's troubled face.

"Why should you desire to leave your duties?" he asked. "Gloss Boyd is well cared for."

"I know it, sir," replied Free respectfully. "But he is my friend. And he has no one here but me."

"No. There would not be time to get his friends here, even if they could afford to come. The doctor tells me he cannot last more than a day or two."

A spasm as of pain crossed the face upon which the older man's eyes were fixed.

"There is no one to come but his sister," said Free. "I have spoken to the doctor about it. He says she could hardly get here in time."

"No."

The principal's eyes had fallen to his desk. He sat as if lost in thought.

"Poor boy! He had the making of a man in him," he said at last.

"A better man than the majority of them."

The silence had lasted long—long enough for the voice of Free Stanlin to grow husky.

"If every boy were as ready as that one to carry the benefits he receives here to those less fortunate," said the principal, "there would soon be a difference in our people. Gloss Boyd would have made his education a well from which everybody might draw."

"It was all he wanted it for."

Free Stanlin felt an uncomfortable mist before his eyes. It was hard to talk of Gloss Boyd's life and plans in the past tense.

"What is it you want to do?"

The voice of the principal had grown business-like again. There had been a lurking tenderness in it when he spoke of Gloss.

"I should like to go home for a few hours," said Free. "I wish to consult my father. Afterward I want to stay with Gloss."

"And leave your studies entirely?"

"I could easily catch up," replied the young man. "And in any case I could not study while—while I know there are only a few days—or hours—left to be with him."

"No. And it will comfort him. I have been with him to-day," said the principal. "The giving up of such plans as his does not come easily. You will go home to-night?"

"Yes. By train to the nearest point. I shall be back early in the morning."

He kept his word so literally that the morning was still young when he softly crossed the floor of the hospital room and surprised a great round drop as it fell upon

the shaking hand of Gloss Boyd. The boy shook it off feebly.

"I sure thought I could do it, but I can't," he said. "She don't know, and it'll grieve her a sight more that I never wrote."

"Magnolia?"

"Yes."

He was propped up in bed, his weakened fingers holding on desperately to a pen he had been trying to guide across the paper laid on a pad before him. The difference between yesterday and to-day caused a sharp sinking of Free Stanlin's heart.

"There ain't nothin' I *can* do for her."

The boy's eyes went despondently to the half dozen illegible lines his hand had traced.

For the moment the encouraging word failed on Free Stanlin's lips. He was silent in the presence of his friend's grief. He knew something of the protecting love Gloss felt for his sister.

"I know it's all right. I ain't grumblin', or settin' up my judgment against Him who knows better than me." The words came when the silence had grown more expressive of pain than speech. "Maybe I'd never have done much. I'm dreadful slow at learnin'. They'll find out the way without me. It ain't them. It's Magnolia. I've done cared for her ever since she was a baby. It's desertin' her to die now."

It had found voice at last—the sorrow which gave the bitterness to death. Ever since the word of doom was spoken, it had been burning in his heart. He had hidden it there from all eyes. He could speak of the other disappointment, the failure of his hopes for Hebron, but not of this. Magnolia was his—his alone. It was true Free had shared his plans for her, and given some useful suggestions. But Free did not know her; nobody knew her but him—Magnolia, his little sister.

"Let me do it for you."

The voice that spoke was strangely unsteady, but the hand that found the hot, weak one of Gloss Boyd, and held it in a firm clasp, had the strength of friendship in it.

"Write to her? Maybe you'd better. I wasn't wantin' it so. I thought I could do *that.* It's mighty little. But the least thing's more'n I can do for her now."

The feeble voice broke.

"No, not that," said Free. "You'll manage the writing yet. But the other, the carrying on of your work—for her and the rest. Gloss, boy, you've had to give in, but that doesn't make it failing. There isn't a plan that need fail, except that you cannot carry it on yourself. Why shouldn't she do the work you wanted to do? She is quicker at study than you. You have said so lots of times. What is to hinder you from training her for a teacher—through me? She could study as you would have done, and go back and teach the boys and girls at Hebron."

For a moment a light broke over the face of Gloss Boyd. Then it died out.

"She could have done it mighty well," he said regretfully. "But that's all over now. I sure can't do another thing for her."

"Yes, you can. You can give me the right to do it. You can carry on your plans for her through me, and your plans for Hebron through her. You've not failed. Such effort as yours can't fail. Let me do it. I'll send her to Fiske. Then she'll not have to work her way through."

Free's voice had grown eager. He felt the feeble flutter of the hand he held in his own.

"Fiske? She sure couldn't go there. It's mighty costly."

Gloss had heard of Fiske University for young men and women of his own race, and he knew that Free was expecting to go there next year. But Fiske had always seemed as far above his head as the blue depths of the

sky. Fiske for Magnolia! It would be starting on the level on which Free Stanlin stood. But it would not be any too good for her. Only it was impossible. There was nothing before her but the shut-in life of Hebron.

A wistful longing came into his face.

"Yes, she *can* go there," said Free. "You know I was going next year. Well, the money that would have taken me will take her. I'll stay at home. I've got plenty of time before me yet. Magnolia shall go instead."

For a moment Gloss looked at him with startled eyes.

"Stop!" said Free, as the boy tried to speak. "You must not say it—that 'no.' It hurts. I can't bear it. I've got to do something for you. Do you think I don't care—that we have come to the end—you and I?"

The eyes bright with fever were still looking into his. In that look the two understood each other. Gloss did not say the "no" that had been fluttering on his lips.

"But if you do—that—you will have to give up your college course."

The words came after a silence that had accomplished more than speech.

"No—not in the end. Father always wanted me to spend a year or two on the plantation. He is willing enough to let the money he would have spent for me go for Magnolia, and keep me at home. I shall earn enough to pay for myself later."

"It's a mighty big sacrifice. I wouldn't take it if it wasn't for Magnolia."

The humble, grateful eyes were searching those of Free Stanlin. If they had seen there a sign of regret, Gloss would even then have refused the gift. They saw only gladness.

"Do you think I wouldn't do more than that for you?" asked Free.

"I suppose you would. You were always good to me," said Gloss.

The remembrance of the light in the boy's eyes brought

comfort to Free Stanlin long after that light had faded into the dim glaze of unseeingness.

Gloss lay back against the pillows, and looked in the face this surprising gladness that had come to him. And then in the strength of it his fingers once more grasped the pen, and found themselves equal to the task of guiding it. The writing was not very straight, nor very legible, but later on it told its own story to Magnolia's heart.

For the rest, Free sat long by his friend, and wrote it fully, explaining the whole situation to the girl, with all the arguments for the adoption of the new plan just as they fell from the boy's lips. In a few sympathetic words of his own he wrote of Gloss and his condition, and then laid the letter aside unsealed. Its story was not yet all told.

With the effort to write to Magnolia, Gloss had fought his last fight.

"It'll sure comfort her," he said, and lay back with a smile on his lips.

He had accepted the sacrifice of Free Stanlin in a spirit of simple gratitude. It had taken away the bitterness of death.

"It ain't all failure. Magnolia will do more than I could. She's a lot quicker than me. I sure ain't got nothin' to say against God's managin'."

Free heard the low-spoken words as the first stroke of the bell for evening prayers was bringing the students in a throng from halls and staircases to form in procession in the grounds. Upon the doctor's last visit, an hour before, he had pronounced the boy unconscious.

"Your work will surely not fail. Magnolia will do it."

Free was bending over to look into the face that had grown still again.

Did the boy hear those words of promise? Free did not know. Before that bell sounded again for prayers—

this time to begin the day—he had opened his letter again, for the education of Gloss Boyd was ended.

"His work is not finished," he wrote. "It remains in your hands and mine. We do not know each other, but we both loved him. I think you will not refuse his request made through me. Later on, if you will let me, I will make the way smooth to carry out his wishes. We are neither of us acting for ourselves in this matter, but both for him."

He sealed his letter, and dropped it into the post-office box. Then he went to his room. Tuskadela looked strange to him, for the humble, whole-souled lad from Hebron had graduated from it.

## CHAPTER XII.

"DERE sho' be times when de mightiest speech is jes' to be silent. I'se standin' wid eyes downcast befo' de Lord. His ways am past findin' out."

Down the dark, seamed cheeks of Uncle Pete trickled a briny stream. The hot, May sunshine was pouring in through the little cabin window, but for a wonder Uncle Pete's door was shut. Not a dozen times since the old man had occupied it had that cabin presented in summer so inhospitable a front. Birds and bees, pickaninnies and aged cronies, sunshine and air, all were free to enter Uncle Pete's cabin and go and come at will. But to-day the old man sat alone, and the door was shut.

"De good Lord he'p dat po' chile!"

The song of a mocking bird outside, rampantly glad, for a moment broke in on the almost solemn stillness of the cabin.

"Yesterday *she* was a-singin'," said Uncle Pete slowly. "I misdoubt de blithesomeness is as clean and for ever sweeped out of her mournin' heart as de sweetsome flowers is rooted out of de hollers when de great roarin' river rises and swishes ober de banks. Dere was flowers of gladness in her heart, sho', and it done Uncle Pete good to see 'em. Bless de chile, de deep waters has overtook her and dem glad days is ober. Dere may be others comin'. Only de Lord knows. But dese of her early days is cert'nly past, and de po' chile be walkin' in de dark."

She was not walking then. She was sitting in the deep shadow of the woods, with a blank despair upon her face that could find expression neither in word nor movement. The abandonment of grief that had characterized

her acceptance of her brother's departure to Tuskadela was entirely wanting now. She sat, or rather crouched, beneath a clump of pines, and stared at the familiar woods with a stony unseeingness. Over her head a squirrel chattered defiance. She did not hear it. The world was dead—or her heart was dead—for from all the bright, animate life Gloss was gone. The world had been going on since, but she did not know it.

It was not that death had come and taken a life; it was that death had conquered and killed life—life as a whole—for with the death of Gloss, life, as Magnolia knew it, was dead. It could not exist without him.

It had come as a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. Gloss had never told her he was ill. That troublesome cough had not figured in his letters. The very last one had been full of eagerness. In it he had communicated his scheme to her. She had waited impatiently for the next, and had laughed lightly as she held it in her fingers; then stopped to remark that "Gloss had sure grown mighty stingy, for it was lesser than any he had ever written."

It was the last laugh that had played on her lips. Already her fingers were tearing open the letter, while they held carelessly the thicker one in a strange handwriting. Two minutes later a strong, determined hand pushed aside some women who stood in the doorway of the post-office, and Magnolia walked out into the sunlight. Life had for her been overtaken of death in the interval.

Two or three loungers quickened their steps as she passed them, and with an effort to keep alongside the girl, demanded news of Gloss. She left them behind without a word. She did not know they were there.

Her steps never once broke into a run, as they had done when that first letter came from Gloss. Impatience was as dead as hope. With a long, quick stride that was made without conscious effort, she left all other travellers upon the road far in the rear. With the same quick

stride she entered Uncle Pete's cabin—her own home since Gloss went away.

"Read it! He won't never write another."

She put the letter carefully into the old man's hand, and then stood without the movement of a muscle and watched him as he read it.

"De Lord he'p us! Po' boy—po' chile!"

Then Uncle Pete dropped the letter to fling his shaking arms round Magnolia.

"Honey, chile, don't look like dat. Dere's quick permotions and dere's slow. Gloss he's got de order to come up higher."

"He's dead," she said, in the same low, hard voice.

"No, honey, he ain't. Dat chile neber die. He jes' got his permotion, dat's all. But it put him so mighty high above us dat we natchelly can't see him, and we think he dead. We powerful big fools if we reckon dat chile eber die."

She made him no answer. Neither by word nor movement did she respond to the close, loving embrace in which the shaking arms held her while the old man tried to speak words of comfort. That was twenty-four hours ago, and the hard, stony look on her face had not changed in the interval. The day had grown old since she entered the wood. She knew little of the flight of time. Time, like everything else for her now, was in abeyance.

When the sun began perceptibly to approach the horizon, she lifted her head. A moment later she rose from her crouching position and began to walk across the wood. It was fairly evident that she was not bound for Uncle Pete's cabin, for with her first movement she had turned her back upon it. The shadow of the trees cleared, she came out upon the highroad, the same along which she had walked with Gloss when he started on his journey to Tuskadela. She walked fast, as if in haste, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left.

"Lor, she not see nobody. She look jes' for all de worl'

like a oneasy sperit," reported a negress, who, going in an opposite direction, at length stopped at Uncle Pete's door and reported a meeting with Magnolia.

"It a wounded spirit, Aunt Kissy," said the old man sadly. "Dat po' chile is sho'ly grieved to death."

"Dat cert'nly true, Uncle Pete," said the woman, shaking her head impressively. "Dat gal and boy sho' made idols of each oder. Dis is de outcomin'."

"You'se sho' argifyin' mighty queer, Aunt Kissy," responded the old man promptly. "Maybe dat chile did make a idol o' Gloss. But sposin' she did? Dere might easy hev been a worse. Dar heaps o' gals makes idols o' deyselves. It gwine a mighty big step higher to make a idol outer dat boy dan to worship her own pretty face. Lor, Aunt Kissy, I'se knowed women what's grown old now, dat sho' made idols of dere own cheeks and noses and eyes. Dat chile do a heap better'n dat."

Aunt Kissy departed, worsted, and Uncle Pete once more closed his door and sat down in the shadow.

"Po' lil' gal," he said slowly, while a big tear hung for a minute in a wrinkle beneath his eye. "De chile days has done gone and left her. She was jes' a bit of a blithesome gal when dat letter come. She's a sufferin' woman now, and de light heart of de gal is cert'nly gone for eber. I know it, sho'. She's done turned de corner betwixt de gal nature and de woman nature. De gal happiness is 'stinguished like de blowin' out of a candle. De woman happiness may come to her yet, for de Lord am sho'ly good, notwithstandin' that when His good is jes' ezackly of de character of what we know-nothin' human dunces calls evil, we'se mighty prone to run our heads agin de oppersite wall and say dere no more happiness in de world for dem what's been afflicted. Dat chile will come to de light yet, but dere a mighty dark passage to go through first, and she ter'ble lonesome wid her sorrer."

The sun was quite down before Magnolia stood again upon the spot where Gloss turned in the road and put

his hands on her shoulders. It was here that her feet came to a stand, and she stood looking into the distance, as she had looked when he went away out of her sight.

"I sure was a big fool!" The lips that uttered the sounds were stiff. "I could have stopped him from goin' if I'd said a word. I thought I was sendin' him for good—good to him. And he was a-goin' to his death. He was a-goin' to that swamp—and them white men—and the beginnin' of his death. And *I* sent him."

The sun swept on below the horizon, and the stretch of ruddy road changed into a dull, grey path, and this into a scarcely defined line in the darkness, and the girl stood yet on the spot where her brother's life and hers separated.

"I sent him to his death!"

The first faint rays of a rising moon had but a few moments before penetrated the darkness, and the road was again clearly defined.

"No, chile, you didn't. You'se overestimatin' your power. You sho'ly am. Dere's only One got de power to say to dat chile 'Come up higher; you'se larnt enough.' It cert'nly arrogatin' too much to ourselves for any of us weak and tremblin' mortals to say *we* does dis and dat. De good Lord d'rects dis world, chile. Don't you go thinkin' you has a hand in it."

She turned on him with a sob in her voice.

"Uncle Pete, he'd have stopped if I'd told him."

"Maybe, chile, and maybe not. He thought he would, but bless you, if de Lord above wanted him to go to dat school, he'd have goed, sho' as you'se standin' dar."

The old man stood watching the moon as it rose higher. Magnolia's eves were also fixed upon it, but she did not see it.

"Ain't it 'bout time you turned de grievin' into doin', honey?"

Her eyes came back and sought his.

"*He* was allus doin', dat po' boy. Ain't you gwine take his place de way he ask?"

"I don't know. I reckon it's no use."

"Lor, honey, don't you dar say dat," said Uncle Pete impressively. "No use tryin' to finish out his life same as he planned it? Chile, does you feel like cuttin' it off dat away?"

There was no answer.

"He done planned it so's it could be finished," continued the old negro. "Dat would be cruelsome to de last extent to spoil all he done jes' bekase you was too grieved to be furtherin' his wishes. Dat chile done put hisself on one side allus. He done worked till he dropped. Ain't you gwine finish his work?"

"Yes."

There had come no light into her face, no lessening of its pain, but the stony look had changed into one of resolve. She turned her back on the rising moon and her face toward Hebron.

"We'll go home," she said.

"Yes, honey. And you better read dat oder letter agin. Dat gen'leman what wrote it was his friend. I misdoubt you ain't read it yet wid an understandin' heart. We'll sho' go home."

They went, and Magnolia took up again the letter over which her eyes had travelled with the lightning speed of fear in the first moments of her anxiety to know what her brother's hand could not write. She had not comprehended half of what was in it. She read it to-night with "an understandin' heart," and tears fell upon the paper. When the letter was laid aside, the aching wound had in it a more human pain. From that night it was understood that Magnolia would go to Fiske.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The neighbourhood around West Stanlin's farm was a populous one for a country district of Alabama. The negro planter himself employed more or less frequently some two hundred people, for his activities included a cotton gin and a saw mill in addition to the cultivation of his land. Labour was in demand. It was a district in which the negroes outnumbered the whites four to one, though the disparity was partly offset by the preponderance of the white race in the village of Pine Ridge some seven miles distant. In view of the supremacy in point of numbers of the black element, it was not altogether surprising that when the postmaster of the district died, and there was talk of appointing another, a scheme for putting a coloured man in his place should be set on foot.

"We-uns are cert'nly in the manjority," declared an energetic coloured orator of the neighbourhood. "Dar's been a white man in dat office long nuff for de white people to have done had dere share. It's we-uns' turn, and dar's plenty nuff of we-uns to repersent de matter in sich a contravincible way dat de people what has de gibin' away of dat post-office will sho' put one of our people in it."

"I dunno, I'se sho'," commented a sceptical listener. "Who's we gwine to choose?"

"Who's we gwine to choose?" echoed the speaker disdainfully. "Lor, Preach, you *is* a fool. Dar ain't but one onliest man round dis away dat can stan' up side by side wid de white folks and not look *re*-markedly insignificant. Who's dat man? Why dat man is West Stanlin. Course it is. He cert'nly fit for de office. He got de standin' and 'spectability. Dar can't nobody say

he ain't a 'sponsible man. Now den, frien's, is we gwine choose him and set things a-movin' to get de 'thorities to 'pint him?"

"Bless me, I sho' don' care a kick o' my leasest toe who goes in dat office," said the man called Preach. "It don' make no differ to me who picks out my letters. I sho' don' have nuff of 'em to make no row 'bout. If de white man want dat office, let him hev it. Dat what I say. Dar no manner of use contrairyin' him. He a mighty oncomfortable critter to hev anything to do with when he mad. Dis yere Preach ain't gwine mix hisself up in no bothersomeness. Now I tell ye. He know a heap better'n dat."

"Dar be men of our race what are unconscrutable cowards," retorted the orator witheringly. "Dis yere company know well nuff what for you Preach is slippin' out of all 'sponserbilerty like a great twisty snake. Dis yere company know you wheedle money out of de pockets of Mr. Ross and Mr. Heathcote, and de other gen'lemen, pertendin' all de time dat de nigger like nothin' better dan to be dust under de white man's foot. Dar's dem dat flatters wid dere tongues—you Preach listen and take home de warnin'—and dere hearts is all great clutchin' hands to pick an' take when de eyes of dere masters is turned behind dere backs."

All of which was so convincing that Preach retired from the assemblage, and hied him to the white planters for whom he worked, his tongue itching until it found an opportunity to tell that "dem foolish niggers was plannin' a mighty impertinent perceedin', dey sho' was."

"A useful nigger, that Preach. No fear of anything going on in the neighbourhood without his hearing of it."

Franklin Heathcote threw away the end of his cigar and looked meditatively across the darkening fields.

The two older men who sat upon the piazza of the Ross house nodded approval, though a cynical smile came to the lips of one of them.

"Fetch and carry feller, eh?" he said. "Bring news to you of what's going on in darkydom, and carry back hints useful in the other camp—to say nothing of supplies."

"Oh, he's loyal enough," said Franklin Heathcote carelessly. "He knows which side his bread is buttered."

"Knows how to butter it, you mean. Well, what do you think of the post-office business?"

The speaker was a little, spare man, with the sharp features and keen eye of a Yankee. That the place of his birth lay far north of the State of Alabama was likewise attested by the manner of his speech. A certain energy and racy humour characterized it, utterly at variance with the quiet tones of Cuthbert Ross or the half impatient but wholly Southern accents of the younger man.

"Oh, that will all end in smoke," said Franklin Heathcote. "The niggers know better than to make a row."

"A 'row' signifying any attempt to alter the existing state of affairs," said Hardy Kenyon, the Northern member of the trio.

"Certainly," replied Cuthbert Ross, with a slow puff at the cigar held between his lips. "Why should the darky want to alter anything? It suits us, and when we're pleased he has no right to be displeased."

The lips that spoke were grave, but a twinkle in the eye belied them.

"The nigger never knows when he's well off," retorted Franklin Heathcote. "If he did, he'd keep in his place. What does West Stanlin want with the post-office? It will do him more harm than good. We're all his friends now. He's a fool if he doesn't see where this is going to lead him. He doesn't need the money, and he might have sense enough to know that there are dozens of men round here that won't put up with taking their letters from a darky."

"On the ground that it would hurt the letter, or the man?" quoth Hardy Kenyon.

"On the ground that there never has been and never shall be any social equality between the nigger and the white man," said Franklin hotly.

"Bless my soul! Hear the boy. Social equality in the handing out of a letter!"

Hardy removed the stump of his cigar from his lips in order to give utterance to a chuckling laugh.

"It's not the letter, it's the principle of the thing," said Franklin. "They'll be expecting to stand side by side with us in the government of our towns next."

"Why not, when they help fill the towns?" asked the other, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Why not? Because a nigger shall never in the smallest particular rule us. I tell them all squarely to their faces that a black man shall never rule a white one. They're not fit for it—won't be so long as the world stands. I'm their friend while they keep their place, but if they try to get out of it, they'll find they have me to reckon with."

"Well, now, who's going to quarrel with that?" queried Hardy. "Every man in his place is the watchword of a nation. Bless you, man, it's only an idiot who would gainsay that. What *is* his place, though? That's the question. What's yours, and what's the nigger's?"

"Every man has his own answer to that," interposed Mr. Ross quietly. "The settling of places has made most of the fighting in the world."

"His place is to serve, and let the white man rule," replied Franklin. "It is for his good as much as ours. He ought to be able to trust us. We're his friends, and we won't see him take any harm so long as he behaves himself. We all went crazy once, and let him try his hand at ruling. What sort of a mess did he make of it? We are not fools enough to do it again. We were born to it. Let him leave it to us."

"Ay, he *is* leaving it to us. And we are doing it with a vengeance," said the quiet, half sarcastic voice of Mr. Ross. "Some of us would rule him out of existence."

"No, no, not so fast," contradicted Hardy Kenyon. "We won't go as far as that. We know better. Truth is, we want the negro. We can't do without him. He does our work, and does it cheap. A white man wouldn't work for what the nigger works for. We shouldn't ask him. The darky will work for next to nothing, and live in a hovel that a superior being would turn up his nose at. Yes, and he'll pay us a good rent for the hovel, and never raise the question of conveniences and decencies."

"Decencies!" sneered Franklin Heathcote. "What does he know of them?"

"Nothing, my friend, nothing," was the reply. "How should he? We manage all that. We put him up a one-roomed dwelling with a tiny cookhouse, and turn him in there to bring his family up, and then moralize, when occasion demands, on the lack of virtue in the negro character. Tells both ways, that arrangement does. Gives us a good fat percentage on our money, and puts us in the right when we want to shew that depravity is inherent in the black race. No, we can't do without the negro. If the darky's the problem of the South, he's the pocket book of the South also. It would be a poor prospect for the Southerner—I'm a Southerner myself now, you know—if the negro were eliminated from the situation. He's a useful element when he's kept in his place."

"That's the pinch—to keep him in his place," said Cuthbert Ross, and again there was a suspicious twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, we shall teach him yet where that place is," replied Hardy. "We can legislate till we do. We've got things in our own hands. He'll learn in time not to lift his head too high. He's dependent on us. He knows already that it's better to work for us for a little than it is to starve."

"No fear of his starving while our hen-houses are well stocked," said Franklin.

"No fear of his starving at all," responded Hardy. "It wouldn't answer our purpose to let him. What we want is a good, working race of niggers that'll bear keeping down. We like the nigger—in his place, which is clear at the bottom. We're his friends. We'll help him when he's in trouble, and see to it that we lose nothing by our generosity, since we can make him work out the debt afterward with a good fat interest added to it. We'll give him our cast-off clothes, and the scraps from our table, and be kind and benevolent to him in every way, always provided he keeps his place. When he steps out of that, when he gets an erroneous notion that he's a man in precisely the same sense that the white male citizen is a man, then, sir, it is time to pull him up."

"Oh, you may sneer all you like," retorted Franklin, in an irritated tone. "I suppose you'd be for giving him an equal vote with the white man. We know better. We know how to count out his vote when he casts it. And we'll take care before long that he does not go through the farce of casting it. The nigger shall never have a hand in governing this country, not while there's a Southerner left in it."

"Humph! I'm a Southerner as well as you," said Hardy Kenyon.

"No, you're not. You call yourself a Southerner because you live here, but you know nothing of the real Southern feeling. I tell you we're the best friends the nigger has, and he knows it, but we won't have him put out of his place. He's a nigger, and he'll never be anything else. He never was fit for anything but hard work, and he never will be. He'd be contented enough where he is if you Northerners would let him alone. He can't learn, and he doesn't want to learn. He can hoe corn, and pick cotton, and do the white man's work, but he'll never rise above that."

"Gently, Franklin! Hold on there a bit," interposed Mr. Ross quietly. "That assertion is too sweeping. How about a man like West Stanlin—and his son Free? Where is your theory in that case?"

"West Stanlin is a fool," said Franklin Heathcote significantly. "If he were not, he'd see which way the wind blows. Unless he takes care, it will blow a gale one of these days that will sweep him back where he belongs."

"West Stanlin is as clever a manager as any man in America. He can beat you Southerners hollow at running a plantation," laughed Hardy Kenyon.

"Who's that? West Stanlin?"

Ted Renshaw came up the steps two at a time.

"What's this I hear?" he added. "That darky's going to get himself into trouble if he doesn't take care. Thinks he's a white man because he owns six hundred acres and hires a thousand more, and can send his son to school. He needs to be taught that he'd be only a nigger if he owned all the South. He's the sort that's dangerous. I'd rather have half a dozen scamps of darkies like that Preach, than one upstart like West Stanlin. The others may rob your corn bin or your melon patch, but they won't presume to imagine themselves on an equality with you. That West will have to be taught a lesson yet. He's got a heap of dangerous notions in his head, and somebody will have to get them out."

"You leave West Stanlin alone," said Cuthbert Ross decisively. "He's an honest fellow, and deserves all he's got."

"And all he'll get if he pushes himself into that post-office," laughed Ted.

"Oh, I reckon he'll know better than to try that," replied Franklin Heathcote.

In spite of which prediction, it was soon understood that West Stanlin had acceded to the wishes of his friends and would apply for the position of postmaster. Betsey was strongly opposed to the scheme.

"We ain't in no need of the money, father," she said, "and it'll maybe anger the white people."

"Ain't it jest about as likely to please the coloured ones as it is to contrairy the others?" asked West quickly. "What's it matter which is pleased and which teased? When two sets o' folks dead opposed to each other is both fightin' to get their own way, they can't both hev it. It ain't no onreasonable thing for our people to want a postmaster of their own colour. I'm the only man that can serve them. There ain't another could stand side by side with the white folks and hold his own."

The ring of pride in West Stanlin's tones gave force to the words. Hide it as he would, there was a soreness in the coloured planter's heart arising from the knowledge that the least distinction above his fellows, the smallest civil office, was considered too good for a negro. West Stanlin had no desire whatever for the emoluments of the place in question, but inasmuch as the white people chose to consider the position as one of their own prerogatives, it acquired value in his eyes. The negro planter was proud—in his own way as proud as the white people around him. Betsey could not see it in the same light.

"It ain't wise, father," she persisted. Now you listen to me, and jest don't hev nothin' to do with no upsettin' changes. We *is* happy now. It's a heap safer to be humble than to be reachin' out after the big things. There ain't anything bigger than happiness, and we'se happy. You jest let a white man hand out them letters, and you look arter the cotton."

"I ain't aimin' to neglect the cotton," said West doggedly, "but I cert'nly am aimin' to stand up like a man and let white and coloured, both, see that we-uns ain't neither cowards nor know-nothin's, if we *are* niggers."

Betsey sighed, and shook her head.

"We don't know none too much," she said. "That man knows the most what knows jest when to go on, and when to stop. This sure ain't the time to go on."

Nevertheless West Stanlin did go on, and there presently arose much enthusiasm among the coloured population as a certain petition received more and more names, with crosses affixed thereto by such negroes as did not boast of the accomplishment of the ready penman. The negro planter took all necessary steps with a business-like promptness and ability that made it a not unlikely thing that the next post-office appointment would prove a triumph to the coloured race.

All this did not transpire without the knowledge and disapprobation of the white planters. It was not long before a decidedly strong feeling was aroused. West Stanlin began to feel the antagonism in the air. White men who had always accosted him with a friendly nod barely returned his salutation. Some went so far as to pass him with a blank stare. Vague rumours of possible disaster floated around. Such opposition aroused the combativeness of the negro planter. His determination to carry his cause to a successful issue became strong. Betsey's heart grew heavy in those days.

"It's downright sinful to be that set that you can't see the danger right afore your nose," she said. "It ain't as if there was on'y ourselves. There's that po' boy. If any harm comes outer this, the chile's got to suffer."

"There ain't nothin' comin' out of it but a bit of triumph for our race," replied West defiantly. "I'm only doin' what any man has a right to do—applyin' for a place I can fill honest enough."

"Yes, you are," retorted Betsey. "You're riskin' what it's took us all these years to scrape together. You're a-lettin' a bit o' pride make you clean blind to what everybody else can see."

She only wasted words. West Stanlin had persuaded himself that this was a question which involved his people as a whole, and he brought loyalty to his race to the aid of his pride. The more he saw of the temper of his

white neighbours, the more determined a front he presented.

"You needn't bring the boy into the argument," he said, when Betsey's motherly fears found expression. "Free ain't the one to counsel givin' in. If he was at home he would push as hard as I'm doin' to secure that post-office for a coloured man."

"I'm glad he ain't at home," said Betsey emphatically. "There ain't nothin' comfortin' in strife, and he's missin' a heap o' strife bein' away jest now."

There were not wanting, among the influential men of the neighbourhood, those who had too much respect for the negro planter to stand by and see him run into difficulty without a word of warning. Among these Franklin Heathcote was the most outspoken. He felt strongly on the subject, but he had an equally strong feeling of friendliness for his neighbour of a darker skin. No more than West Stanlin himself could he be neutral in this controversy. For the first time since he brought her in triumph to his home, the young man read hearty disapproval in Esther's eyes. She was very openly against him in the struggle that had arisen.

"Why should you or I object to taking our letters of Mrs. Stanlin or her husband?" she asked. "She is a woman to be respected—a dear, motherly soul that it is good to have for a next-door neighbour. And we are to turn our backs on her and hers because West Stanlin thinks he can sort letters as well as a white man."

Franklin looked into her rapidly kindling eyes and smiled.

"You shall take your letters of Betsey Stanlin or anybody else you've a mind to take them of," he said. "Nobody will ever try to step out of his or her place with you. But everybody is not like you, and the neighbourhood has decided that it will not have a nigger pushing himself forward. That's all there is in it. We've a right to say whom we will have and whom we will not have."

"No, you haven't," said Esther quickly. "You've no right to over-ride your neighbours because your white skin makes you socially stronger than they. It *is* over-riding your neighbours when a small minority of you carry things your own way by hook or by crook. Get a rival applicant for the post-office, and fight the thing out fairly, if you will. But don't be a party to the meanness of securing by intimidation what you cannot get in fair fight."

Her low, clear voice had a ring in it that set Franklin Heathcote's blood tingling. He was too much of a lover still to bear her scorn with equanimity.

"Esther, what sort of a man do you think you married?" he asked, and there was in his tone something she had not heard there before.

Her honest, indignant eyes sought his. Then there came a light to Esther's face.

"I misjudged you," she said. "You and Ted Renshaw are not of one mind."

"The gods forbid!" he replied, and his laugh had in it some bitterness.

It hurt him that his wife should put him in the same category with the young man who had come back and forth often of late, ostensibly to talk over this new development of the race question. It was a question upon which they had much, but not everything, in common.

Franklin's love for Esther had grown so absolute and absorbing that an adverse opinion of himself from her lips was a stab that went to his heart. To be lowered in her eyes was a disaster that he was not prepared to face. Hence his vexation that she should have relegated him and young Renshaw to the same rank.

She saw the shadow on his face, and came and put her hand upon his shoulder, looking with searching eyes into his.

"A meanness toward a negro is the same thing, essentially, as a meanness toward a white man," she said.

"And—Franklin, I could not bear anything in you that was not the perfection of manhood."

He drew the hand from his shoulder, secured it, and imprisoned the other.

"There isn't a nigger in existence that's worth losing your respect for," he said. "Esther, you do me a wrong. My antagonism to the upstart pretensions of the negro is as honourable as your own advocacy of his cause. It's fair fight, or nothing. I had it out with West himself this morning."

"You told West Stanlin of your disapproval?"

"Of course I did. I told him why we were going to oppose him, and advised him, if he wanted to retain the goodwill of the neighbourhood, to give up such a fool's idea."

"And what did he say?"

Franklin laughed.

"The old man fired up as hotly as you could have done yourself," he replied. "Told me he should be sorry to lose the goodwill of his white neighbours, but that he had coloured neighbours to think of also, and he doubted if they did not stand more in need of his services than the white men did of his submission."

Esther smiled.

"You were worsted," she said. "But at least you had the satisfaction of open fight, and possibly parted from him in a friendly spirit."

"Why not?" he asked. "I had said my say. I told him nobody but a fool would persist in a game that was a losing one from the beginning, that the white men would not stand any innovation on the part of the nigger, and that he'd never get the post-office."

"And he replied—"

"That if he failed he should not be much the loser, but that he should at least have proved to his neighbours that he was neither a coward nor a bidder for the favour of a few at the sacrifice of the many."

"Just like him," said Esther. "I hope he'll win."

She looked into her husband's face with eyes that smiled. He winced a little at her words.

"You are a most undutiful wife," he said.

"No, you are a refractory husband."

His lips sought hers, and for the time the controversy was over. But a suspicion that had grown into a pain had been removed from Esther's mind. She had known all along that her husband's attitude and her own toward the negroes were not identical. It was only since she had heard certain hints dropped by Ted Renshaw, that she had feared the difference of opinion might point to a difference of moral sentiment. To her undeviating sense of right, any act that would not bear the light was a disgrace to manhood and womanhood, and the half joking, half angry threats uttered by the young men who gathered to discuss with Franklin this latest local difficulty, made her cheeks burn with shame and anger. The cheeks could grow cool now. Franklin might wax wroth at the "unmitigated stupidity of niggers that hadn't sense enough to know where to draw the line," but he was incapable of anything that could not be done in the name of fair and open fight.

Before a week had passed, Esther's heart throbbed with tumultuous gladness that the suspicion had been laid to rest. There came a night when the sky was bright with a light that owed its origin to neither moon nor stars, and when that deadly crackle and roar which belongs to nothing but a burning building, drowned the soft night sounds.

"Franklin! Quick! They will need help. West Stanlin's house is burning."

Esther's voice had a ring of terror in it.

The young man awoke to see the red glare falling upon his wife's face as she stood with the curtain lifted. It did not take him long to reach the scene of the fire. There was not a negro who worked harder that night to

save West Stanlin's property than did the young planter who was so strongly opposed to the pretensions of the coloured race. Franklin and West stood side by side, fighting the flames. And when the victory was no longer doubtful, side by side they watched the devourer lick up the remnant of the old man's home. It had been quick destruction. Barely two hours from the time when Esther first perceived that bright, red glare, the house was a glowing heap.

It was while the flames still shot out spitefully from the low pile of burning wreckage, that Esther Heathcote laid her hand on Betsey Stanlin's shoulder.

"Come home with me," she said. "There is no more to be done, and you are weary to death."

Betsey's worried eyes looked into her face.

"I couldn't rest," she said. "I'll jest stay by what's left. It's 'most all gone up in smoke. I couldn't rest while them things was burnin'."

"Then come later on," urged Esther.

Betsey shook her head.

"I'll stay here," she said. "There's the little bit of a cabin me and West lived in when we first begun. We'll go back there and take what's saved. Ah, me! I misdoubted harm was comin'. I'm glad that po' chile wasn't here to see it."

"Don't go there to-night," said Esther, her arm falling around Betsey's broad shoulders. "You'll be lonely and sad. Come and let me care for you as you would comfort and care for me if I had lost my home."

"I couldn't, Mistress Esther," said Betsey. "We sure's got to be alone, me and West, to face this."

A dry, hard sob caught the last word and mutilated it. But Esther understood.

"Don't you go thinking hardly of anybody," she said. "Maybe the fire was purely an accident."

"No, it wasn't, Miss Esther," returned Betsey. "That fire didn't start without hands. If West hadn't gone agin

the white folks, my house would have been standin' now."

Esther looked at the weary, patient face of the older woman, with eyes that filled with tears.

"I wish you'd let me shew you how sorry I am," she said.

Betsey's eyes met hers again.

"I'm grateful to ye," she said, "but I couldn't go nowhere to-night. Me and West's got to face this alone."

West Stanlin was standing at that moment by the side of such of his household goods as he had saved. The glare of the fire fell on his massive face and threw it into relief. That lurid light found neither passion nor fear to reveal, but a dogged determination that met this new trouble without flinching. It was the same undaunted front that had been turned to every misfortune since he and Betsey began climbing the steep road to competency together. To-night's disaster would take several years of work to retrieve, but the man had never yet known what it was to lose courage.

He was just now intently watching a group of young white men who stood over on the plantation road. By the light of the still blazing house he could discern their faces. And above the crackle of the fire he heard every now and again a mocking, boisterous laugh.

"Been fightin' agin the post-master to-night, haven't ye?" he said, in a low, deep voice that was drowned in the roar of the flames. "And usin' mighty mean and concealed weapons."

There was another burst of laughter from the group in the road.

"Fightin' in the dark," pursued West, "and gettin' another man to pull the trigger of the gun. You ain't none of ye had no *hand* in settin' that buildin' on fire. I'd swear to that. But the black man that put a match somewheres to the wood of my shed wasn't workin' for himself. It was a black man, sure. White men don't do sich

work as that. They set black men at it. And then they stand and laugh at the ruin."

To the accompaniment of another burst of merriment he turned and walked over to the spot where those half dozen younger white men of the neighbourhood—planters or planters' sons—were manifestly enjoying the scene of destruction.

"Seems like a holiday to you young gentlemen, doesn't it?" he said, his bright, keen eyes scanning their faces resolutely. "Think it serves a nigger right to hev his earnin's turned into a bonfire. Well, take your fun, and then go home and recollect that trouble don't allus choose a restin' place accordin' to colour. You young men mayn't hev no enemies to he'p it on for you, but you'll likely stumble on griefs yet, and you'll know what sorrer means. You'll maybe learn then that trouble's trouble even when it falls on somebody else and not on you. It's them that ain't got up over fur into manhood, and ain't known much of the real fight of life, that laughs at another man's pain."

He walked slowly away, and until he was many yards distant not one of the group remembered to utter a guffaw.

The night wore on, and the crowd that had gathered round the burning house dispersed.

"West, we'll be gettin' them things into the old cabin. We shall hev to go over a many of the steps we've trod with achin' feet afore we ketch up with where we was yesterday."

Betsey laid her hand on her husband's arm, and looked at him with eyes that were dull and heavy, and full of reproach.

"It's a high price to pay, but I'm payin' it for our people," said West doggedly.

"That don't look near so sure to me as it does, maybe, to you," responded Betsey slowly. "It's easy thinkin' you're doin' out o' pure love for others what's mighty

comfortin' to your own pride, and plumb in the line of your own wishes. We'se sure paid a high price, but jest what we paid it for ain't powerful clear. Come and he'p move the things in. We'se got to live somewheres, and 'tend to things, even if it does tear our hearts to see the home we've slaved for burnin' up before our eyes."

It was the only time she ever reproached him with the share he had had in that night's catastrophe. He listened to her in silence. Then he turned and began carrying the furniture to the little old cabin where he and Betsey began the upward fight together.

The plantation road on which West Stanlin's house had stood was well travelled on the day following the fire. Curiosity drew many thither, a genuine feeling of sympathy for the negro planter brought others. Among the latter was Cuthbert Ross.

"I'm sorry to see this, West," he said, coming to a stand by the still smouldering ruins. "If ever a man deserved to enjoy the fruits of his labour, you did."

"The fruits don't seem to be extra sweet jest at present," said West cynically.

"You are going to rebuild?"

"I don't know. Betsey's for lettin' it be for a time. It'll take a right smart sight of money to put up that house and get things in it agin."

"There are trees on my place that you're welcome to if you've a mind to have them sawn," remarked Mr. Ross. "And if there's anything else I can do, don't fail to say so. I shall be glad to do anything in my power to help you out of this trouble."

West Stanlin could not doubt the genuine friendliness of this old resident of the neighbourhood. In spite of himself, some of the bitterness went out of his tone. He unbent so far as to explain that the rebuilding of the house would take all the surplus money he possessed.

"And I ain't used to feelin' that I don't own a dollar," he said.

"It won't be long before you make another," responded Cuthbert Ross. "Set West Stanlin down a beggar to-day, and he'll have money in his pocket to-morrow."

The coloured man laughed.

Cuthbert Ross stood for a minute as if in thought. Then he turned to his neighbour.

"West, we're neither of us youngsters," he said. "If we haven't got some of the lessons of life into our pates by now, they'll never get there. A man learns by the time he reaches our age that he can't always stand on securing all his rights. The fellow that's bound to grasp hold of his rights with a big hand, will surely find he'll get some wrongs along with them."

West looked up sharply. Then, seeing the half cynical, wholly friendly look on the white man's face, his lips relaxed.

"I've got a good handful of the wrongs this time," he said.

"It doesn't altogether follow that this is one of them," said Cuthbert Ross, glancing significantly at the smouldering heap. "It may be. I'm not denying that there are fools among white men."

He relapsed into silence. The wind blew the smoke of the burning wood into the faces of the two men as they stood side by side. Suddenly Cuthbert Ross moved a few steps away, turned, and came back.

"I've been debating whether I'd make an idiot of myself by asking you to suffer a few words of advice," he said "It's a drug in the market, and about as well liked as poison."

West laughed.

"I guess I know what you want to say beforehand," he remarked.

"Well, treat yourself to a dose of it then," was the answer. "Look here, West. You ought to be big enough to shew a little magnanimity toward the weaknesses of white men."

West Stanlin's eyes twinkled for a moment in spite of all that had gone before. "Didn't know they had any," he said.

"We're a set of fools," rejoined Cuthbert Ross, "a set of fools with prejudices enough to whip us on to new acts of folly on the smallest provocation. West, if you'll allow me the criticism, you're mightily wanting in that big-souledness that can afford to let other men be imperfect if they like. You've got a good lot. Can't you let our weak white men keep their prejudices? It means a deal more to them than a certain position does to you."

The laugh on his lips found a counterpart on those of West Stanlin.

"You prosperous coloured men haven't quite as much sympathy for our weaknesses as you might have," continued the white planter. "You push us to logical conclusions. We don't want to be logical—we want to indulge our weaknesses. Can't you afford to be generous in a case where no real principle is involved? Think it over, and talk to Betsey. She's got the sense of a dozen men."

West Stanlin did not feel like contradicting the last statement. He had an uncomfortable conviction that if Betsey had had her way his house would have been standing to-day. The whimsical words of Cuthbert Ross rang in his ears long after the planter had ridden off down the road. "Can't you afford to be generous?" Gradually that question drove away his inclination to pose as an injured hero. He began to ask himself what real good it would do him or anybody else if he should become postmaster.

All day his mind worked on these new lines, and he went home to Betsey at night weary in brain and body. He found her sitting over the gaping hearth with her head in her hands. She did not look up when he entered.

"Betsey, woman, we'll build it up agin, and do that bit of walkin' uphill side by side as we done afore," he said, coming and standing before the broken bricks on the old

hearth, and looking down at the strong, patient woman who had never flinched at any labour or difficulty.

"I'm thinkin' of our Free," she said. "The chile's poorer by all that what was burnt up last night. An' while we're goin' the way our feelin's is pushin' us, he's goin' to be the loser."

She did not lift her head as she spoke.

"We ain't goin' no further. We're goin' to stand stock still," said West. "We're goin' back over them steps we'se took afore—you and me—and we ain't goin' no further in this strivin' with men. I sure don't like goin' back on what I said to our people, but there's ways of lookin' at this that I hadn't seen. I been a-lookin' at it all round. I ain't prepared to risk no more till there's a good reason for it. There ain't a plumb good reason for this. They can call me a coward if they like. I've figgered it out. When I can do anything for our coloured people that's goin' to be a real help to push 'em up, I'll do it, if it costs me all I've got. But this postmaster business ain't no real good, and I'm done with it."

Betsey looked up, and a smile quivered on her lips, while a tear gathered in her eye.

"We'll begin agin," she said, "and there'll be somethin' left for the chile yet. I was fearin' that before this fightin' was ended it was goin' to be plumb swept away."

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE negro car attached to a certain Southern train was wretchedly full. There seemed to be a pressure of travel. A crowd of workmen had come aboard at an early stage, and seats were not to be had. The men were of the lowest class, and their numbers gave them a license they would not otherwise have taken. They monopolized the car to such an extent that the half dozen women travellers felt in an uncomfortable minority.

The train was behind time, and for the last half hour seemed to have been stretching itself out like a live monster panting to catch up with an unseen rival. It rolled and lurched and swung, then lessened speed with a series of jerks, and came to a reluctant stop at a small country station.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor.

A small, wiry negress, with a big bundle in one hand and a bigger bundle in the other, came running across the platform followed by a girl.

"Hi, mister! Don't be in a hurry," she screamed in a thin, shrill voice that made itself heard all along the train. "I'se got one o' you'se tickets here, and you'se sho' got to take my Oberie Salvation Washin'tonia along wid you. She's gwine to Ten'see, and I'se gwine to see she gits a right good seat. I'se done paid a heap o' money for dat bit of a ticket, and I wants her sot down comferble. Go on dar, you Oberie. Lor, de car's chock full!"

"Come, hurry there," called the conductor angrily.

"Lor, bless ye, chile, I *is* hurryin'," said the woman, as she simultaneously pushed the girl up the steps and hoisted herself and her bundles till she could thrust her head into the door of the car.

"I wants a seat for dis gal, I does," she explained.

"She's gwine to Ten'see, and she sho' don' know de way. It's a mighty long step dar, I reckon. I'se lookin' for some 'ooman char'table nuff to he'p a po' gal. She ain't on'y twelve, dat Oberie ain't, and she sho' ain't got de sense to find her way to Ten'see alone. I want dat 'ooman to see her t'rough."

At that moment the conductor sounded his whistle.

"Hi, you! What you doin' dat fur?" screeched the negress, retreating to the steps. "I ain't wantin' to go dat away. I'se comin' off dis yere consarn." Then her head was thrust afresh into the car as she entreated: "Ain't dar nary one on ye can see dis chile on her way?"

A laugh from the men inside drowned the last word.

"I'm goin' to Tennessee. I'll do all I can for her. She can maybe squeeze in here."

The voice that spoke was ringing and clear. The sound of it stopped the rude laughter of the men. The speaker, to all appearance a white woman, made room for the child as she spoke.

"I thanks you, honey, wid all my heart," said the negress. "Go in dar, Oberie. I'se sho' got to go."

And go she did, assisted in no very gentle fashion by the conductor, who dragged her unceremoniously down the steps of the moving car. The last seen of her she was picking herself up from the platform where she had measured her length when she made her hasty descent. Her attention was divided between scrambling to her feet, reaching out after her bundles, and shaking her fist at the conductor as he stood looking back from the retreating train.

The negro car was noisy with laughter. Heads were thrust out of the windows, and loud, rough voices shouted back words of raillery. The girl Oberie stood with eyes wide with fear, staring at the door through which the woman had made her hurried exit.

"Don't you think you could squeeze in here?"

The words recalled her from her bewildered stare, and

she hastily dropped into the vacant space, to the detriment of the freshly ironed cotton dress that the girl by her side had drawn up into the closest possible compass.

If that girl had not been riding in a car set apart for coloured people, nobody but a very close observer would have suspected that she had negro blood in her. Her face was whiter than on the day when she stood by the negro church in Hebron, and watched the determination strengthen in her brother's eyes. Magnolia looked older than on that Sunday. There had come to her lips a sorrowful curve that was a stranger to them then. There had come also a more womanly reserve. They were capable of the same passionate utterance, the same quiver of grief, but they had learned to keep silence in the presence of pain. The girl who was on her way to begin the study that should make her fit to carry to completion the work Gloss had tried to do and failed, had put a purpose in the place of a joy. And she was strong of will to carry out the purpose.

It was Uncle Pete who failed in courage when the end came.

"It sho' goes hard wid me to see you start 'way, honey," he said, looking into her face with eyes that were not as sharp as usual, by reason of the tears. "If I'se b'reaved of my children, I *is* b'reaved. Gloss, he's gone, and you'se gwine out of my sight. Chile, Uncle Pete feel like cryin' out to de Lord to reg'late dis bit of our lives some oder way, but lor, de good Lord know best. He hab a place all ready prepared for you at dat Fiske. Who's I dat I should say He not knowin' what He doin'?"

Magnolia's was a different going from that of Gloss. Several letters had passed between her and Free Stanlin, and she started with the full benefit of his experience, and with enough money to bring her to her journey's end comfortably. He had made all necessary arrangements for her at the University, and nothing remained but the journey.

This in itself was a big undertaking for a girl who had only seen the roaring monster of a locomotive at the safe distance of the highroad, and that but a few times in her life. Uncle Pete insisted on seeing her safely started in "dem hurry-scurry cars dat's here now and clean gone 'fore you can git your eyes lifted to look arter dem."

"Good-bye, honey," he said. "Dis yere's a mighty big world, but if you travels from one side of it clear over to de oder, you won't git one lil' hair's breadth 'way from Uncle Pete's love. You'se in his heart, chile, and till dat's done stopped beatin' you can't git away from Uncle Pete."

The station where Oberie Salvation Washingtonia had come aboard was left far behind, and the train was shaking and straining along low level lands where there was little of interest to be seen. The travelling was almost as fresh to Magnolia as to the child by her side, except that for her it had already lasted for many hours. She would have liked it better but for the rough company. Through the open door she saw white people picking and choosing cars and seats. There was no choice for those of her race. The number of coloured passengers did not perhaps on ordinary occasions warrant more than one car, but Magnolia wished she might take a seat in some of the other carriages, where there were more women, and where she would be out of hearing of the rude, coarse jokes and laughter of the negro workmen. The girl was not accustomed to the smooth things or the smooth people of the world, but at Hebron nobody was a stranger, and if the people were rough she knew just how far she might and how far she might not trust them. These men were strangers, and their rampant bearing annoyed her.

There was at first some raillery at the child Oberie's expense. Magnolia cut it short by a sharp request that they would let the girl alone.

"She ain't in nobody's way, and she ain't troublin' no-

body," she urged. "If it was jest so with everybody in this car, it would be a mighty sight quieter and more comf'table."

The men being in the wrong, it followed as a matter of course that they met the protest with boisterous mirth. Nevertheless a pretty girl with flashing eyes and undaunted mien is not weaponless, even under such circumstances. The laugh subsided, and no single individual of the crowd felt inclined to renew it. Whereupon it happened that the eyes of the small girl Oberie ceased to roll portentously, and she even summoned up courage to settle herself comfortably at Magnolia's side.

"I'se sho' scared to death," she confided to her protector. "I don' know nothin' 'bout de way, nor what I'se got to do. I'se got dis ticket, but I don' know what dat conductor white man gwine do wid it or me."

"I reckon you've done got to go the greater part of the way along with me," said Magnolia. "We ain't got nothin' to do till we git out of this car at a place we're comin' to. I'm listenin' for when he calls it out. I sure don't want to go past it."

"I ain't gwine speak anoder word," declared Oberie Salvation Washingtonia promptly, "les' when I'se talkin', de man he call out dat place an' we-uns git tooked too fur. Lor, what would us do?"

True to her word the girl sat bolt upright, looking anxiously into Magnolia's face every time a new station was called, and shaking her head disappointedly when the train dashed out into the open country again. The afternoon had come before her watching was rewarded by an answering sign from Magnolia.

"There it is," exclaimed the girl at last, as the conductor thrust his head into the car and shouted a fresh name. "That's sure the name of the place where we've got to git into another car."

She rose hurriedly and began to gather together her packages. To the two country girls who had, the one a

loudly expressed, and the other a half acknowledged fear that the train would start again before they could get themselves and their belongings out of it, a formidable moment had come. There was enough bustle and noise around them to bewilder them. Everybody seemed to be getting out. The men who had filled up every available seat were in as much hurry to be gone as they had been to enter. They poured forth, a hustling, joking crowd, through which it was not easy to force a passage when the platform was reached. Magnolia succeeded at last in gaining the side of a trainman, and questioning him as to whether this were the right place to change cars.

"Yes, yes," said the man hastily, pushing her aside and passing on.

Not until the crowd began to thin as the train pulled out of the station was Magnolia able to see the name of the town. Then she sprang forward.

"Stop, stop! We've sure got out at the wrong place."

One or two of the bystanders laughed. The rest were too busy with their own concerns to heed the two girls who for a minute ran distractedly along the platform after the train, and then collected their senses sufficiently to acknowledge the futility of the effort.

"What we-uns gwine to do?" demanded Oberie Salvation Washingtonia in a breathless voice.

"I don't know. Wait till another train comes along, I s'pose," was the answer.

The tone was more expressive of doubt than of confidence. But when inquiry elicited the information that no other train would go in the desired direction that day, Magnolia stood aghast.

"There's one comes through here late to-night," said the official, "but it's a limited, and your tickets won't take you on that."

"And we've got to stay here till to-morrow?"

"You can't get on till this hour to-morrow."

"Lor, what we-uns gwine to do?" demanded Oberie

Salvation Washingtonia in a loud, insistent voice that was almost a wail.

"How should I know what you're to do?" returned the uniformed servant of the railway company. "You should have sense enough to keep on a train till you want to get off."

He walked away, and Oberie Salvation Washingtonia turned a pair of frightened eyes on Magnolia.

"What we-uns gwine to do?" she repeated.

"Find somewhere to sleep to-night, and go on to-morrow, I s'pose," replied the girl.

Her words were braver than her heart. While she spoke she was calculating the probable expense of the blunder she had made, and lamenting the necessity of taking care of Oberie Salvation Washingtonia. Not that she had any thought other than of keeping her promise to the child's mother. The girl was as helpless as a baby, and could on no account be left to look after herself. She was grateful for Magnolia's protection.

"I'll tote your bundles and mine too," she said, possessing herself of enough packages to make her sturdy figure look as thick as it was long. "I'm good an' strong."

So they passed out into the streets of a big, busy town, and viewed in open-eyed wonder a phase of life neither had ever encountered before. Everything was marvellous—street cars and shops, crowded thoroughfares and stylish equipages, the noise and the persistent hurrying of the throng. But more than all, the number of streets astonished the country girls.

"They sho' goes on for ever," declared Oberie Salvation Washingtonia, when the two had walked till they were tired.

"Where's we gwine to sleep?" she added half an hour later, when, another corner being turned, more houses and shops and buildings of every description confronted them.

"I ain't sure," replied Magnolia. "I've been lookin' out

this long while, and there don't seem to be no great sight o' places that ain't a heap too dear for us. There's one a little ways back that don't want more for a bed than I can pay. I'm thinkin' we'd better go there. I'm 'most tired."

"So'm I," responded Oberie, with a sigh of weariness. "An' I'm dreffful hungry. I've got good victuals in my bundle, but I sho' want to set down befo' I can eat 'em."

Thereupon they retraced their steps till they came to a house of entertainment that was modest enough, in all truth, to warrant them in believing it within their means. Into this, after a careful and protracted study of the rate of charges, they entered with some trepidation.

The proprietor of this not over clean nor particularly inviting place of rest for travellers, looked the pair over superciliously as they entered. Then he pointed a thick, dirty finger at Oberie Salvation Washingtonia.

"I ain't got no place for *her* here," he said, in a loud, rasping voice. "We don't take in no niggers."

The colour rose sharply to Magnolia's cheeks. She turned without a word and went out.

"We can find accommodation for you," called the proprietor after her.

Then she turned her head.

"I'm a nigger too," she said proudly. "If you ain't got room for her, you sure ain't got room for me."

They went into the streets again. The town had lost its attractiveness. It had become a weary succession of hot, inhospitable streets. It is strange how a rebuff can alter the aspect of a neighbourhood, yes, and of a life.

"What we-uns gwine to do?"

The question broke in as an irritant on Magnolia's thoughts. She left it unanswered while she turned into a street a little more squalid than any they had yet passed through. Another hotel, so called, brought her feet to a stand.

"I'm goin' in here," she said, "to see what they've got to say."

A half defined thought that the lowest could not afford to scorn the negro prompted her to try again. She walked in with heightened colour. When she came out the colour had deepened.

"We'll git out of this road," she said impatiently. "There ain't nothin' either clean or decent about it, if them that lives here do set themselves up above a nigger."

They went back to the main thoroughfare. The day was hot and the streets dusty. Hunger and thirst assailed the travellers, the thirst predominating. Rest and refreshment began to present themselves as of supreme importance. Magnolia found her thoughts turning with longing to the cool spring water of Hebron.

It was hardly to be wondered at that Oberie's feet lagged before a stand of ripe fruit, and that she stared thirstily into the shop beyond, where men and women were drinking soda water. These girls had no name for the refreshing beverage. They had never seen it before, but the look of it was suggestive of comfort and coolness. Oberie's eyes grew big with eagerness.

"Dat dar boy paid a nickel for de bubblin' stuff in one o' dem glasses," she confided in a loud whisper to Magnolia. "My, don't I wish I had a drink of it!"

"I guess you're near parched with thirst," said Magnolia sympathetically. "Maybe we'd better go in and git two glasses. We cert'nly can't go without drink all day."

They went in, Oberie somewhat in the rear. A boy hurriedly filled a glass with soda water at Magnolia's order, and handed it to her. She passed it on to the child.

"No, you don't! Get out of here, you dirty nigger."

The glass was hurled from the girl's hand as she raised it to her lips. It fell with a crash upon the floor. The bystanders laughed, but the shopkeeper, who had dealt the blow, glared at the astonished child.

"There don't no impudent niggers drink out o' my glasses," he exclaimed angrily. "Now then, take yourself off in double quick time, or I'll have you locked up till that mug is paid for."

Oberie Salvation Washingtonia retreated in affright. Not so Magnolia. She turned on the irate shopkeeper with angry defiance.

"I ordered that stuff. What did you spill it for?" she demanded. "Ain't my money as good as anybody else's?"

"Your money's good enough," growled the man. "But this ain't a nigger's place. Who's goin' to drink after that darky do you think?"

An ugly expletive accompanied the noun. Magnolia fixed upon the speaker eyes that were bright with scorn.

"Her lips are maybe as clean as yours," she retorted, as she swept out of the shop.

"We've done got to go thirsty," she added, joining Oberie Salvation Washingtonia at the corner of the street, where the girl stood quaking with fear, ready at any moment to take to her heels at sign of the threatened arrest.

"What we-uns gwine to do?" wailed the child. "I sho' wish I was back with my mammy."

Anger and fear for the time made these two "nigger" strangers forgetful of hunger and thirst and weariness. They walked on, hardly heeding where they went. It was long after, when they came to an extensive park, and saw trees and flowers and green shade, that the craving for rest overcame them again. This was not an exclusive place, for children, and they the children of poverty, were freely disporting themselves within. No great distance off, in a secluded spot, an iron bench stood invitingly empty.

"If we-uns could go in dar, and set down and eat our victuals—" suggested Oberie, with a half sob as a conclusion to the unfinished sentence.

Magnolia hesitated. The gates were not far off. While they walked toward them doubtfully, half a dozen white

girls, rudely clad and still more rude of bearing, passed in with a rush, loudly laughing and pushing one another almost on to the well-kept flower beds. Magnolia and Oberie essayed to follow, but the next moment the elder girl drew back. Across the corner of the roadway a board conspicuously displayed the notice—"No dogs nor niggers allowed in here."

"Come back, Oberie," called Magnolia imperatively, "they've done put us among the dogs."

A wave of bitterness swept over the girl's heart. She was hungry and utterly weary, and she did not know what to do next. In this Southern town there seemed to be no place for the negro. There was provision for everybody else, poor as well as rich, but to be a negro and a stranger was to be a target for insult. There were privileges for all other classes, but only restrictions for the negro.

Doubtless there were places in the town where the coloured people lived, for she had seen them engaged in various forms of labour. They were as necessary to the comfort of the white people of the towns as they were to the wealth of white planters in the country. But the places where they were tolerated needed seeking, and Magnolia was a stranger and not accustomed to travel.

She found herself looking with hostile eyes at the white faces that passed her. There had never been any antagonism in her heart toward the white race—never until Gloss set out to walk to Tuskadela. The story of that journey had left a rankling wound. To-day anger burned hotly. She felt that she hated these men and women of another race who had taken upon themselves to say that she, and those with whom her life had been passed, must stand aside in all the details of life, and be satisfied with the crumbs of comfort and privilege the predominant class was willing to accord them.

"The foundation of a country is its workers," mused the girl, unconsciously, in this moment of anger and

weariness, quoting Uncle Pete. "We-uns is the workers. But sure there's nary use for a foundation but to be kept under."

She laughed, bitterly and mirthlessly, and Oberie looked up at her in wonder.

"I cert'nly don' feel no laugh inside o' me," commented the girl sharply. "I'se clean done out. I got to hev some victuals."

With that she dropped down by the roadside, just outside the bounds which dog or nigger might pass at his peril. With a determination born of despair she began to untie the knots of the great red handkerchief in which the "victuals" were wrapped. Hesitating barely a moment, Magnolia slipped down by her side, a sigh of relief bearing witness to the weariness of the limbs that could find no resting place but the dusty road.

Sitting there, in full sight of the greenery and the shade, the girls satisfied their hunger, and were a target for the curious and amused glances of the passers-by. More than once Magnolia's forehead reddened. She was beginning to discover more pride than she had believed herself possessed of.

Within the inclosure, the broad, comfortable seat remained invitingly empty. Outside, the girls sat in the street, too utterly weary to go on until the sun went down and the cooler breath of evening was felt. Then Magnolia rose.

"We better be movin'," she said. "We can't stay here all night. We've cert'nly got to find somewheres where they don't ask for a white skin along with your money before they'll let you lay yourself down and sleep."

"What we gwine to do?" asked Oberie, the ever-recurring question passing her lips for the fortieth time as she scrambled hopelessly to her feet and stared at Magnolia.

The girl did not answer, but she walked on determinedly until a black face appeared in the throng of people.

Then she laid her hand on the arm of the woman to whom the face belonged.

"Is there in this town a decent place where a negro can git a bed?" she asked. "We're strangers, and we've done been turned away from the white people's hotels till we're tired of asking."

The woman sniffed.

"You was fools to ask at dem white hotels," she said. "You can't git in dere. Dere *is* nigger places, but I can't d'rect you. I'se in a des'prate hurry. Go long dat away, and down dat oder next street over dere, and ask any nigger you see. I sho' got to go."

And she went, while Oberie Salvation Washingtonia looked once more into Magnolia's face and uttered her query, "What we gwine to do?"

They went along one street, and down the next, and along a good many next unto these, and when the light had almost faded, Magnolia stopped before a place, designated a hotel, to which a coloured man had directed her. The sign—Accommodation for negroes—assured her before she entered that the colour line was here drawn on the other side. Nevertheless from this place also she retreated with flushed cheeks and beating heart. She was only a country girl, thoroughly unsophisticated, but the atmosphere of that place made her recoil. She knew little of evil, but she knew enough to understand that evil was there.

"We've got to go on further yet," she said, taking the reluctant Oberie by the arm. "We don't stop in no place like that, not if we have to walk these streets all night."

It looked as if the last alternative might have to be adopted. After that minute's experience within this place to which she had come, but to which she ought never to have been directed, Magnolia shrank from two or three houses open to negroes which presented an appearance not sufficiently inviting to overcome her newly aroused suspicions.

Night settled over the town. Hunger and thirst increased. The girls satisfied the former as they walked, and left the latter unquenched. At last Oberie dropped down upon the sidewalk, uttering her plaint: "What we gwine to do? I sho' can't walk anoder step."

Magnolia turned to her in alarm. They were in a neighbourhood where, she instinctively realized, to draw the attention of the passers in the rapidly thinning streets was to court a notice fraught with danger. She was herself trembling with weariness, but she was afraid to stop.

"Git up and try again, Oberie," she entreated. "I doubt we sha'n't find any decent lodging to-night. We'll jest make our way back to the cars. Maybe they'll let us set on that platform till mornin'."

She wasted words. Oberie Salvation Washingtonia had come to the end of her endurance. She began to cry, audibly and drearily, while Magnolia stood by with fears that increased momentarily.

"What's the row?"

Magnolia turned, and looked into the face of a coloured girl only a few years older than herself. It was a bold face, and virtue was not written upon it. Kindness was, however, and just now kindness meant much to these strangers lost in a big town.

"She's done out," Magnolia said. "We both are. We've come by the cars and got out at the wrong place, and we've done walked till she's dropped."

"Ain't got no money?" questioned the older girl bluntly.

"Yes. We've got money to pay for a bed, but we can't git the bed," explained Magnolia. "The white people that has decent hotels won't let us in, and the places where they'd take us ain't fit for no respectable girls to go to."

The young coloured woman gave utterance to a low whistle.

"That ain't a bad way to put it," she said. "There *is*

places though—one or two—that's for niggers, and that's kept decent."

"Where?" asked Magnolia eagerly.

"A good ways from here," replied the girl. "A right smart walk away from here. And I misdoubt it's too late for them to take you in to-night. Do you know what's the time by the clock?"

"No," replied Magnolia, "but it seems as if we'd walked a week since the sun went down."

"It ain't a half hour short o' midnight," replied the girl. "They'd sure think you was a queer one to be wanderin' about till now. It's goin' to take more'n half an hour to git to the nearest."

"What we gwine to do?" suddenly demanded Oberie, who had stopped her wailing to listen to the girl's words.

"Come along o' me," was the decisive answer. "I ain't got no place to brag on, and"—turning to Magnolia—"maybe I ain't what *you'd* call decent, but you can share what I've got, and while you're there nothin' that ain't fit to enter heaven shall set foot in the room, always 'ceptin' myself, and I'll be there to see you don't take no harm. I'm a nigger, and I'm one as people maybe has the right to turn their noses up at, but I can't see a country girl set in the streets all night, and shut up my heart agin her. Will ye come?"

She looked straight into Magnolia's eyes, and there was eagerness in her own. The good in her was aroused, and she was anxious to protect these girls from harm.

Her honest kindness won the day.

"Yes, and we'll thank you for the chance," said Magnolia, "and pay you what you've a mind to charge."

"I ain't goin' to take nothin' out o' yer pockets, and I'll see nobody else don't neither," laughed the girl. "You come along. It ain't but a little piece, and you'll be safe with me, if I *am* a bad un."

She laid a strong hand on Oberie's shoulder and dragged her to her feet.

"We'll have *you* in bed in a jiffy," she said, possessing herself of the greater part of the child's bundles, and keeping a hold upon her arm.

She led the way to a wretched little attic room in a house from which Magnolia would have recoiled if the girl had not been with her. As it was, she followed her guide with but one or two apprehensive glances. There was something in this girl who boldly avowed herself to be outside the ranks of the virtuous that inspired confidence. She set the best she had in the way of food before her guests, and when her wants were supplied bundled Oberie into one of the two beds the room contained.

"She's certn'ly dead beat," she said. "Is she kin o' yours? She ain't your sister, I dare swear."

She listened with real interest while Magnolia explained her connection with the child, and told of some of the difficulties they had encountered that day.

"This is a mighty hard town to git along in if you're a nigger and ain't got no friends nor nobody to tote you round," she commented. "The white people here's powerful jealous of the nigger steppin' out of his place. Curse 'em all! They're scarin' themselves at nothin'. There ain't no fear the nigger's goin' to rise, save maybe here and there a one of 'em. It's too rousin' hard for a nigger to try it often. We ain't got the stuff in us to do it. Leastways that's what the white folks say, and I dunno as they ain't right."

"Why should they be right?" asked Magnolia, a shade of warmth creeping into her tone in spite of its weariness. "Why should not our people rise as well as the white ones? I know there are bad negroes, but even white men ain't all saints."

"Saints!"

The girl's laugh rang out harsh and shrill. She met Magnolia's inquiring glance with another burst of mirth.

"I guess you don't know much about 'em," she said. "I do. Lor, bless ye, them white people put it around that

they're scared to go out because our men ain't all they might be. Gal, I tell ye we nigger women hev a mighty lot more to fear from the white men than the white women has from our men, and the white ones don't git lynched neither. A nigger gal can't set her foot nowhere and not hev some scoundrel after her, and he's as like to be white as black. I ain't sayin' I'm much to boast on, but it was when I was cookin' for a white family that I first went down. It *was* that. The young ladies of that house was well guarded, but me—I was only a nigger. I slep' in the cookhouse, and there was nothing to keep men out. The missis she didn't care so long as I cooked her dinners and done it cheap. I was young then, and didn't neither know nor think. Well, lor, it's got to come. There's never a nigger that's virtuous. I've heared 'em say it hunderds o' times, and by the leader o' all evil there ain't like to be. They put us in temptation that they wouldn't like their own gals to meet, and because we don't stand they say we ain't virtuous. Ah, me! What's virtue? Keepin' straight yerself, and not gittin' into no trouble, I reckon. Them white women's virtuous, sure, and every one of the white men what trifles with a nigger gal is some white woman's son. But she's virtuous, and the nigger gal ain't—not after her precious son comes around. Lor, this 'ere virtue's enough to make you kill yerself laughin'."

Magnolia shrank from the loud, discordant outburst of mirth that followed. The girl saw the movement and her tone changed.

"You don't know nothin' about it," she said, "and you're plumb tired to death. We'll go to bed, and you needn't be afeard to sleep. I'll see no harm don't come to neither on ye."

They went to bed, but even in her dreams Magnolia heard again that loud, discordant laugh.

## CHAPTER XV.

"THAT feller Heathcote's a fool!"

Ted Renshaw tipped his chair back an inch further, settled his feet more comfortably on the edge of the table, and bit the end of a pencil with which he had been making a private calculation.

"H'm! Anything in particular lead to the discovery?"

His sister lifted her eyes momentarily from her book to let fall the query, and then dropped them again.

"Discovery!" sneered Ted. "It's not much of a discovery that a man who goes beyond his depth will find his head under water before long."

"Got beyond yours long ago, didn't he?" questioned Marie, with sisterly amiability.

Ted glared.

"What has he done in particular just now?"

Marie's eyes had been fixed on her book. She had industriously turned a leaf before making the last remark.

"Oh, it's not particular, it's general," sneered Ted. "The feller's crazy. A man who spends four thousand dollars on a woman when he hasn't four thousand cents to his name is either a fool or a knave."

Marie looked at him sharply.

"Who says he has spent four thousand dollars?" she asked. "Have you been overhauling his banking account?"

"Banking account!" repeated Ted scornfully. "That article's like to be a minus quantity. *His* banking account is all on the debtor's side, I dare warrant."

His sister dropped the book into her lap and sat up straight.

"What do you know about Franklin Heathcote's financial affairs?" she asked, a little stiffly.

"Nothing but what all the world may know," replied her brother. "I've just been making a little calculation—that's all. Hunters from Kentucy stables, and fads and fancies by the score, are not bought for nothing. That plantation can never stand it in the world."

"The hunters are beauties," said Marie tantalizingly. "Franklin Heathcote looks the Southern country gentleman to perfection when he is mounted on Bonn."

In spite of her teasing words an expression half eager, half malicious, rested upon the girl's face as she spoke. Marie Renshaw had never entirely forgiven Esther for the offence of capturing the heart of Franklin Heathcote. It was not altogether ill news to her that possible sorrow was in store for this friend of her girlhood.

"Perfection fiddlesticks! You women are all alike," retorted Ted. "A pretty feller can bewitch you whenever he's a mind. I don't expect any sense in *you,* but how a girl like Esther Ross can let herself be hoodwinked puzzles me."

Marie laughed.

"My dear boy, there's a concurrence of opinion against you," she said. "Franklin Heathcote has more friends in this county to-day than *you* can boast of. And Esther was always a person of good taste. It probably ruled her choice."

He uttered an exclamation that was not a blessing.

"His friends won't be so eager after him when he comes to the end of his tether," he said. "It's not going to take him long at this pace, either."

"Well, it won't ruin us when he gets there," returned Marie lightly, whereat Ted glared again.

"I'm thinking of Esther," he said.

"Very good of you," replied his sister sweetly. "You may comfort yourself with the assurance that there is no immediate suffering in store for her. Franklin Heathcote

has the salary of his new office of tax collector to stand him in stead."

"Humph! There was good reason for his being so eager after that position," returned Ted. "He'll want all he can lay his hands on to pay his debts."

The charge of extravagance against Franklin Heathcote was not entirely without foundation. In very truth Esther had already made it herself. Franklin silenced her with a caress.

"Nothing can ever be good enough for you," he said. "I should like to do six times as much, but caution restrains. Nay, do not look so grave. We can stand this little expense I have ventured upon. We'll be veritable misers for the future."

And he really meant to be economical, but it was hard to deny himself where Esther was concerned. He assured himself that he could do wonders with the plantation, now that he had Esther to work for. And he did accomplish wonders, for never before had the fields yielded as they did this year. But his acres were not extensive, and his ambitions and wants where Esther was concerned were very extensive. And it is astonishing how debts grow.

Nevertheless, Franklin Heathcote was happy. How could he be otherwise when Esther was his own? It was worth many a calculation about the meeting of debts to be able to meet the love light in her eyes, or to bring some new pleasure into her life. For the debts were but a temporary thing, he argued. Perseverance would clear them off. He had a dozen schemes for making the plantation more profitable. In the meantime he collected the taxes from his neighbours, and lived in the light of Esther's love.

And Esther never once dreamed that the debts were heavy, or that Franklin had done more than spend his surplus money a little too freely for her delight. She gently discouraged his often extravagant gifts, but she

could not hinder the swelling of her heart with gladness that it was his love for her that prompted the rashness. Of the state of his finances she had no exact knowledge.

"You have married a poor man," he said, when he brought her to the plantation. "I wish I were rich, for your sake, dear. I never felt so greedy after money in my life."

And she laughed and told him she was not used to riches, and should feel burdened if too many of them were thrust upon her.

She felt rich enough in her new home. From cook-house to drawing-room it had been renovated for her reception, and the old, time-worn square house, with its correspondingly square, time-worn columns in front, had received so many beautifying touches that the old man whose death had placed it in the hands of Franklin Heathcote would hardly have known it could he have returned to it then.

The little conservatory at one end of the building was Esther's delight. Franklin had stocked it with treasures, some of which had come from far. Esther made companions of her flowers when her husband was out in the fields overseeing the work of the negroes.

In spite of Marie Renshaw's prediction, she found her neighbours on the next plantation anything but a drawback to her happiness. The young wife and motherly Betsey Stanlin were the best of friends. In the first days after West Stanlin's house was destroyed Esther tried hard to persuade Betsey to occupy a part of her own newly adorned home. The coloured woman shook her head.

"Me and West's happiest jest by ourselves," she said. "We shall get over this sorrer, as we've got over a heap of 'em afore. There's on'y one way to get to the other side of sorrer, Miss Esther, honey, and that's to walk clear through it. Me and West and my chile's done got to go through."

"But you will be none the longer getting through if you come and pay me a visit," urged Esther. "It will be less dreary for you than the old cabin, and—I want you."

"No, Miss Esther, you don't; not if you think about it," said Betsey wisely. "Chile, we'se black and you'se white. I ain't decidin' jest what that means. Maybe it's sayin' one's bound to be higher than the other. Some white folks tells it is. But, honey, it sure means one's diff'rent from the other. And the Lord above done made 'em so. Honey, there's sich a thing as the fitness o' things. Me and West we sure don't fit inter that home o' yours, an', Miss Esther, chile, you wouldn't fit inter ours. There's no call to shet our doors agin each other for that. We-uns that's got any sense knows there's fitness in everything. The rose ain't a lily, and don't try to grow on a lily's stem. We-all can be friends, and near friends, and helpers in trouble, without tryin' to make out we'se jest alike, and mixin' things up without discrimination. I'se obleeged to ye, honey, and I knows your fine house is a sight handsomer than that cabin, but it sure wouldn't fit me and West same as it fits you."

"A sensible woman, that Betsey," said Franklin Heathcote when Esther repeated the words. "It isn't everybody that has right notions about the 'fitness o' things.' Wise Betsey Stanlin might well teach many a man and woman with a white skin."

He was possibly inclined to modify his opinion somewhat when, a little later on, Betsey penetrated to Esther's conservatory and stood looking at the glowing colours of Esther's friends and treasures.

"Mrs. Heathcote, honey," she said, "they'se the beautifullest things I'se ever seed. Them colours is jest a feast to your eyes. But my Free could make a picture of 'em that'd look so plumb like 'em you'd think you could smell 'em. He could, sure."

The pride that swelled in Betsey's voice brought a sympathetic smile to the young wife's lips.

"Does Free paint?" she asked. "I did not know. He has kept his accomplishments too much to himself."

"Paint, honey? That chile had flowers in that room that was burnt that you could 'most see grow. Honey, it's a gift the Lord give him, sure. I don't reckon you've ever seed sich flowers as he paints."

"You must let me see them," said Esther.

"Honey, they'se done burnt," replied Betsey sorrowfully. "That po' chile never said one word about 'em when he come back, but, lor, I seed the dis'pintment in his eyes when he looked at what we'd saved. They was plumb burnt up. We couldn't get nigh 'em."

"He must paint some more," said Esther. "You know the best thing about the artist soul is that it grows. His next pictures ought to be better than the last."

Betsey turned sharply.

"That's right," she said. "He's growin,' sure. There's nobody knowed what he went away for this summer, on'y his father and me. He was learnin'. He was paintin' all the time. He done paid a big white man to show him how. Miss Esther, my Free wants to be jest what you say—an artist. He wants to make pictures that the white folks and the coloured, both, will buy. Honey, does you think a black man will be 'lowed to do it?"

"To paint pictures? Why not?"

There was a laugh in Esther's eyes.

"Chile," said Betsey solemnly, "it's a high-up callin'. It ain't like hoein' corn and pickin' cotton. It's doin' like the best o' the white folks does. Won't they think it presumption? Will they buy a black man's picture? The colour of his hands don't affect the colours of them flower leaves none, honey. I don't s'pose a white man's hands could paint a lily no purer than my Free can."

There was a wistful look in her eyes as she turned them on Esther's face. The question was a very doubtful one in Betsey Stanlin's mind. She had firm faith in Free's ability to paint the pictures, but just how such a proceed-

ing would be looked upon by her white neighbours she did not know. She had strong fears that they might think it wanting in humility.

Perhaps she was not altogether wrong, for the laugh with which Franklin Heathcote greeted the announcement that ambition was stirring in the breast of his young coloured neighbour had more than a little contempt in it.

"It's a pretty wild dream for a nigger," he said. "Well there are fools among all races."

And there are aspiring souls among all races. Free Stanlin knew nothing of the betrayal of his innermost desires to unsympathetic white ears. Had he known, his own ears would perchance have tingled, for the young man had all the sensitive pride of dawning genius. But he went on his way in blissful ignorance, discovering later that Esther had learned of his love of art. He turned carpenter when the new house, which West Stanlin had decided to build upon the ruins of the old, increased daily in height, and stole an hour whenever he could for the brush that had grown dearer to him since his summer studies had taught him to master it more thoroughly.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Uncle Shadrach, I sho' don' know whether I standin' on my head or my heels."

Uncle Pete's spare figure stood in the middle of his doorway, and Uncle Pete's face, a study in gladness, was turned toward the broad, solemn visage of Uncle Shadrach.

"Dat chile mighty nigh home by dis time," continued the old man. "She on de hinder end of her way, and she bringin' de knowledge and de diff'rent self what she got at dat Fiske back to Hebron to we-uns."

As the old man stopped speaking, the big, portly form of Uncle Shadrach drew a step nearer. Its owner looked solemnly at Uncle Pete, and as solemnly shook his head.

"Uncle Pete, you sho' in need of de reprovin' ministrations of a brudder," he said. "You cert'nly is. You'se no pickaninny at dis epoch of your life, Uncle Pete. You old nuff to hev cut your wisdom teeth a long many concades ago, and you sho' ought to hev larned dat de pride of life is a mighty misleadin' thing. What if dat gal *am* comin' from dis Fiske school? She on'y a nigger woman, when it all said. What for she set up?"

Uncle Pete laughed—a merry, chuckling laugh that had no malice in it.

"Bless you, Uncle Shadrach, how you does misconterpret," he said between the chuckles. "You'se away out in your reckonin'. It not Magnolia what set up. It her ole Uncle Pete. He that sot up wid joy he not know where he is. But look ye, Uncle Shadrach. It's joy in de Lord. It sho'ly am."

"Uncle Pete, is you sho' you'se not listenin' to de fader of lies?" asked Uncle Shadrach, with another solemn shake of the head.

"No fear of dat," responded the old man in the doorway. "The fader of lies ain't neber de fader of thanksgivin'. Dis nigger remember de days of old. He call to remembrance his sorrer in de past. And now joy fill his heart. Is he wrong to skip like de young lambs in de field? I sho' feels like crackin' my heels togeder wid gladness."

"Dis yere ain't no time for triflin'," retorted Uncle Shadrach reprovingly. "Better look into de evils o' your own nature, Uncle Pete."

"Lor, bless you," replied the old man, "I not do nothin' of de sort. I look at de goodness of de Lord. Uncle Shadrach, He sho' know heaps more'n any fool nigger. A year ago dis nigger feel for all de world like tellin' Him He actin' most too hard when He take my chillen away. Lor, dar no fool like dese yere human fools what can't see no furder dan de end of dere noses, and what sets up to d'rect de world and Him dat made and rules it. Uncle Shadrach, dar's our Gloss been permoted for a year, sho'. Whar's he standin' now in glory? We-uns is too lil' to tell. He's done served de good God in de mansions above for a whole turnin' round o' this sun. And my gal, my lil' Magnoly what went away wid a heart all broken and grieved, she sho' not de chile what I 'lowed to go out of my sight to dat big university. De white folks dere's done took my lil' gal and teached her like she was one of deyselves. She's lived with 'em, and eat with 'em, and larned of 'em, and Uncle Pete know for sho' she not his lil' gal what he sent away grievin'. She a new Magnolia. She a woman now, and a woman what de Lord am trainin' to take de place of Gloss."

Uncle Pete was not altogether wrong in his estimate of the influence of Fiske upon Magnolia. Her brother's firm faith in her ability to profit by the advantages offered her had been proved well founded. The course of training at the University was one calculated to arouse the intellect and develop the character of a girl like Magnolia. Constant intercourse with men and women of culture

stimulated her to effort. She developed capabilities before undreamed of.

Unlike Gloss, she found herself spurred on by the discovery of her own deficiencies. Bit by bit the influence of the surroundings told. The girl grew less positive in manner, less aggressive in bearing. The angularities of character began to be rounded off. She had always possessed adaptability. It enabled her to fit herself into her new environment. Where Gloss would have quaked and trembled, she entered in boldly and won. She learned quickly—as well the amenities of life as the knowledge that comes from books. The girl for whom Uncle Pete was waiting was still at heart the Magnolia of other days. But she was more than that. She had grown in intelligence and in self-mastery. The very carriage of her head was modified. She was the old Magnolia developed —with a promise of much more in the future.

There were many crudities left. A year is not long enough for the learning of all the lessons of self-restraint and gentle bearing. But Magnolia was an apt student. Her teachers parted from her with the most cordial of good wishes, and enjoined upon her the necessity of returning to complete her course.

There was every prospect that she would be able to do so. Though West Stanlin had lost much by the fire, he had no thought of withdrawing his help from this girl whose education Free had undertaken.

"You've started to give her a helpin' hand for her brother's sake," he said, "and you'll carry it through, my boy. And if you can't go to Fiske yourself yet awhile, you'll stay at home."

It was not a declaration of what in his opinion it was right to do under the circumstances, but rather a statement of what he knew Free *would* do. And his judgment was correct. A certain chivalrous instinct toward the girl to whom he had assumed the position of guardian possessed the young man. The influence of

Gloss Boyd had not died out of his life. Free Stanlin was a better man for the few months of intercourse with the whole-hearted, humble lad who had possessed so keen a sense of his own deficiencies. For love of Gloss Free would have done much more than postpone his own studies at Fiske.

And it was inevitable that he should become interested in Magnolia herself. Many letters had passed between them. He had formed his own estimate of his friend's sister. He had a strong desire to see for himself how far this estimate accorded with fact. His conceptions of the girl had in them, perhaps, a little romance. His actions toward her were certainly tinged with a feeling of chivalry. He would have been more disappointed if necessity had compelled him to curtail Magnolia's educational advantages than if he had been assured that Fiske was for him an inaccessible good.

The home-coming was for Magnolia a very different thing from the out-going. The bevy of girls who occupied one end of the negro car were so full of life and merriment, so thoroughly a company of college girls going home, that loneliness and sorrow seemed for the moment things of the past.

Magnolia was one with them and of them. And yet the pain had never for a moment left her heart; the loss of Gloss was as real a loss to-day as when she held in her hand the last letter from her brother. Nevertheless, time and the associations of the college, had robbed the pain of its element of bitterness. At Fiske the higher side of the girl's character had been brought to the front, and the bitterness and the passion were in abeyance. Pain without bitterness is as a sore without rubbing. It is there, but the hurt is not obtrusive.

Magnolia had not forgotten her experiences on her journey to Tennessee, but she had learned not to brood over them.

"Your standing in the world is the standing your own

sturdy feet can give you, and can neither be bestowed upon you by the magnanimity of your white neighbours nor taken from you by their narrowness of heart," said one of the teachers to Magnolia on a certain occasion. "My estimate of a man's height will not take away one hair's width from his inches, let me belittle him to my heart's content."

The girl was going back with a broader view of life, and a fairer estimate of things, than she had when she came to Fiske.

The schoolgirls had all separated before darkness fell, and the laughter and chatter of the morning were exchanged for solitariness. Magnolia felt the sadness of night creeping upon her. Memories of Gloss returned, and her heart ached for the clasp of his arm, the steady pressure of his hands upon her shoulders.

When Gloss first went away she used to dream of his home-coming. Now it was she who was returning, and there was no Gloss to welcome her.

"There's nobody to tell it all to but Uncle Pete."

In the dimly lighted car a tear might pass unnoticed. There were not a dozen passengers left. Magnolia's head went down upon her hand. Memories of Gloss stole in upon her. Even Hebron would not be home without him. She realized her loss more in the home-coming than she had done in the days at Fiske.

Absorbed in her own thoughts, she did not at first notice that the car had cleared. The evening was drawing on into night. The busy time of travel was over, or so Magnolia inferred when a little later the trainmen began to lounge into the negro car to talk and laugh and joke. Magnolia wished that the car had not been quite empty of members of her own race. She was to travel all night, and she wondered, a little anxiously, who would be her companions. One or two other white men joined the group by the door. The regulations respecting coloured and white passengers did not appear to work both ways.

While it was contrary to both rule and custom for a negro to intrude himself in the carriages devoted to the use of white travellers, it seemed to be no breach of railway etiquette for white men to come in and out of the negro car.

There was one man—well dressed, but certainly not well behaved—who lounged through more than once. On his first transit he looked hard at Magnolia, strolled on, dropped into a seat by the side of the baggage-man, and sat talking. Later on Magnolia saw him again. This time he deliberately placed himself upon an end seat that commanded a view of the whole car, including its one woman occupant. His steady gaze attracted Magnolia's attention. She turned round to assure herself that he was not her sole companion. Somewhat to her dismay she found that conductor and baggage-man, with their following, had departed.

"Where are you going?"

The stranger stood at the end of her seat, looking with insolent admiration into the face that flushed beneath his eyes. The flush was one of indignation. The girl heard the question. Her answer was to draw herself up proudly and open a book.

"Do you hear? Where are you going?"

At the repetition of the question she lifted her eyes and fixed them upon him. He stood in such a way as to prevent her from passing him and stepping into the aisle.

"Sir, that is my business, not yours," she said. "Be kind enough to leave this seat. There is plenty of room elsewhere in the car, and I wish to be alone."

Her heart was beating violently. Now that she looked at him more closely, she perceived that the intruder was not sober. The discovery did not tend to quiet her nerves.

"I shall do nothing of the sort. Don't you attempt to dictate to me," was the insolent response. "Why don't

you answer a civil question? Who are you, and where are you going? You're a handsome girl for a darky, and no mistake. Do you want a drink?"

He drew a flask from his pocket as he spoke, and offered it to her.

At that act of insult the old temper of the Magnolia of Hebron flashed out. The disrespectful tone—an outrage to her womanhood—the offer of the liquor, the leer beneath the words, aroused her indignation. Her hand went out suddenly and dashed the flask from the grasp that held it. It went ringing to the floor.

"How dare you?" panted the girl. "Do you think because I ride in a negro car that I am not entitled to respect, that I am open to every kind of evil suggestion? Get away from the end of that seat. You are not fit to ride in a negro car, or any other. If you do not go I will call the conductor."

Even in her anger she noticed his face turn white with rage.

At that moment the train entered a small station. Magnolia's hand was on the window. She would have raised it, but the man walked slowly off.

When he had left the car Magnolia rose, and with steps that were not quite steady made her way to the door. She had no very definite reason for so doing, except that she felt she could not longer stay in that car alone.

There were several people on the platform, and a little delay was occasioned by taking on trunks. Then a hot box was discovered, and a small crowd descended from the train and gathered round it.

As she stood upon the top of the steps Magnolia saw the man who had spoken to her in the car disengage himself from the group. Followed by two or three others, he turned in her direction. For a moment she felt like retreating. Then she grasped the iron rail and stood her ground. She argued that there was more safety here than in the empty carriage.

"You're the darky that told me I wasn't fit to ride in a nigger car," said the leader of the group, advancing savagely. "You impudent niggers want a lesson."

Before he had ceased speaking he had sprung up the steps, his face working with rage. The next moment his fingers were in the collar of her dress. His aim was the fair, shapely throat above the collar.

Choked, gasping, Magnolia uttered a cry.

"What are you doing, fellow? Let the girl alone!"

A strong arm hurled Magnolia's assailant aside, and sent him sprawling down the steps. Then a tall, well-made figure bounded after him, reached out, gave him a vigorous shake, and set him upright on his feet.

"You get out of here. You're drunk, and don't know enough to let a woman alone."

The speaker's hand was still on the man's shoulder. Not until then did the coward realize that the girl's protector was a black man. A loud oath escaped his lips.

"All right. If you want to fight it out, come on," said the young coloured man quietly.

"Oh, come away, Freeman. It's no good making a row. Leave the darkies to themselves," urged the white man's friends.

One of them linked his arm in that of Magnolia's annoyer and half forced, half persuaded him to enter the train. "All aboard!" called the conductor, and the young negro sprang up the steps.

"If you will go back into your car, I think that fellow will not molest you further."

He looked at Magnolia questioningly, hesitating to define the car to which he was referring.

"Thank you. I was afraid. There were none of our people in there."

She turned into the negro car, and he followed her. A white-haired negress had in the meantime clambered in at the rear end and taken her seat.

"It was very good of you," said Magnolia gratefully.

"No. I think it was merely an indulgence. My fingers itched to give that fellow what he deserved."

He smiled, and looked for a moment into her face. They went into the car together.

"Is this your seat?" he said, finding her belongings.

"Yes. There were none of our people in the car. He would not go away."

She looked up at him, and he smiled again sympathetically.

"You are travelling alone?" he asked, standing respectfully at the end of her seat.

"Yes. I have come from Fiske."

"From Fiske! Then perhaps—"

He looked at her again. Why did the memory of a country boy whose tongue had grown eloquent in its description of the sister left behind in Hebron come to him at that moment?"

"Then perhaps you know one in whom I am interested —the sister of a very dear friend," he said, resuming that interrupted sentence.

A startled look crossed her face. She turned it straight toward him, and their eyes met.

"You are not—you do not mean my brother Gloss!"

He held out his hands.

"We cannot but be friends," he said. "I loved him."

There were tears in her eyes. She did not try to hide them.

"I have more to thank you for than I knew," she said. "May I sit down?"

He took the seat beside her, and they talked of Gloss. Her tears overflowed more than once as he told her of the young man's efforts, and of those later days when he gave them all up.

"I have wanted to know his sister," said Free. "Magnolia— Forgive me. Gloss taught me to say it."

"Why not?" she asked. "You were his friend, and surely you have been mine."

"May I?"

He was looking into her face, his own a little eager. He was thinking that Gloss had not been half eloquent enough when he talked of this sister of his.

It was late in the night when he rose.

"We are almost at my home," he said. "I wish you could stay over. My mother would be very glad to see you. She knew Gloss."

Again the tears came to her eyes unbidden. He thought those eyes more beautiful than ever, shining through a mist.

"I must not," she replied. "I have taken my ticket right through."

"You must stay when you come back," he urged. "Tuskadela is only twelve miles away. I should like to take you there."

Before she could answer, the conductor called the name of a station. Free rose.

"You will not be alone again before morning," he said, glancing over toward the old negress. "I heard her ask for her ticket. She goes your way until past daylight."

A firm grasp of the hand, and he was gone. But though there was a tumult in her heart, Magnolia found that the loneliness and the fear had gone too. She had had an eventful night, yet the rough handling of the white man had already sunk into the background of her mind. She was thinking of Gloss, and of his friend Free Stanlin.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"I SURE said that when the need come to our people, and there was wanted a man to stand by 'em, West Stanlin wasn't goin' to look to his own interests. That time's done come."

The negro planter's tone was one of conviction rather than of controversy. He stood squarely on his feet, with his head thrown slightly back. The light that was in his eyes was of the nature of the fire that has burned in the hearts of men of all nationalities who have risen as pioneers of some phase of liberty which appealed to them, but was not in their day appreciated by the world immediately around them.

The broad face of Betsey Stanlin showed fear and distress. She turned her sorrowful eyes from her husband to her son, and back again to the determined countenance of the sturdy planter. The mute appeal was an answer more expressive than words. It brought Free from the opposite side of the room to lay a caressing hand on her shoulder.

"There are times when a man is a coward if he sits still," he said. "Mother, if I should ever get myself into trouble, and be brought before a magistrate, wouldn't you feel safer if you knew that he was one of our own race?"

He laughed as he put the question, but the lips that answered him quivered.

"Don't, chile," Betsey said. "You couldn't never get into no place where the law could touch you, not without there was a mighty big wrong done somewheres. But if there *was,* I should sure feel safer if them that had to judge knowed jest what it meant to be black. There's white feelin' and black feelin', honey. I ain't denyin' it.

But, chile, the white folks is dreadful sot in their notions. They sure is. And the black man that goes agin their likin's ain't goin' to escape without sufferin'. He ain't, chile. You'se young and I'se old. I'se had a heap o' time to know 'em, and I tell you there's sufferin' in the road of man or woman of our people that contrairys them white men."

"It ain't sufferin' that's the question," responded West Stanlin stoutly. "It's justice. Our people's done asked me to stand for magistrate. They ain't satisfied that all the judgin' should be in the hands of white men. There's cert'nly been cases that's looked mighty like there was discrimination agin our people. It may be there warn't, but it looked plumb like it. Anyway, we've as good a claim to hev men of our race on the magistrates' bench as they-uns hev. There's mothers that'll go to their graves believin' their sons wasn't done right by. It ain't just, that ain't. And there ain't no necessity to give in to it. If it costs us sufferin' to make a stand, it won't be the first time we've suffered, and if somebody ain't willin' to suffer, there ain't nothing goin' to be done."

The slow, deliberate utterance of the words was expressive of a settled purpose. There was no heat of pride or anger in them, as there had been on a former occasion. When the planter heard the plea of the black men who came to him complaining that the ruling race had all the justice in its own hands, their earnestness moved him. Before he made them a promise to stand for magistrate he had weighed the arguments for and against the innovation, and counted the cost.

"It ain't altogether certain that a fight on them lines won't hev to be a fight to the death," he said, discussing the project with his son previous to coming to a decision. "There's been a coward shot or two directed at a negro's heart afore now. I ain't goin' into this deceivin' myself."

His pride in his white neighbours' friendship and re-

spect had undergone a change since the day he talked to Gloss Boyd. He no longer flattered himself that their high opinion of him would influence them to the overlooking of any act that could be construed into an infringement of their rights, or an encroachment upon their privileges. He hardly believed that actual violence would be attempted. He still had some faith in his own position in the county. But he had a strong sense of the enormity of the offence he was about to commit in seeking to become a magistrate. Nevertheless, it seemed to him that there would be enough real benefit to his race to warrant the risking of the danger.

He said nothing to Betsey until the conviction had grown into a purpose. From that time the good woman's peace of mind was a thing of the past. Forebodings of evil disturbed her nights, and the days saw her labouring with a ceaseless industry that could let neither time nor opportunity slip.

"I ain't knowin' where the blow may fall," she said. "We may be wantin' the least thing yet, same as we done after slavery times."

Free tried to argue away her fears, but she shook her head sorrowfully.

"You don't know, chile. You ain't never had no pertick'ler dealin's with 'em," she said. "If them white folks makes up their minds that West's bein' a magistrate is a-steppin' out o' the position a nigger's allowed to occupy, and a-takin' of a position that belongs to white men, there won't neither heaven nor earth keep 'em from stoppin' him. You'll see, if you lives long enough, honey, that I'se right."

It was not long before he saw enough to justify her words. There had been animosity manifested before, when the negro planter presumed to believe that he could sort and distribute letters as well as a white man, but the storm aroused then was only a summer breeze by the side of that which swept through the county when it was

known that a coloured man was to be put in for magistrate. For the negro vote was strong enough to elect West Stanlin if he chose to use it. And that he did choose soon became evident. In spite of organized effort on the part of the white planters, in spite of much pressure brought to bear on their coloured labourers, there was but slight doubt in anybody's mind that his election as magistrate would be carried by such a majority that even a little manipulation in the counting of votes would not frustrate it.

When this came to be acknowledged, feeling ran high. It was not every white man who was convinced that the honour of the county would be compromised if a black man were allowed to administer justice in it, but those who held an opposite opinion could be counted upon the fingers of one hand. The face of Hardy Kenyon wore a cynical smile in those days.

"You Southerners have fallen on evil times," he said.

An informal meeting of the planters had just broken up, and a group, a dozen strong, had made a halt at the post-office, where, though after hours, they called for their letters, and then fell to arguing afresh the ridiculous situation in which gentlemen had to fight for their rights with a mob of niggers.

"Evil times!" growled a representative of the old days of the South. "The South is dead, sir—dead—or her sons would never condescend to argue and cajole, and all but pray for submission from men whose souls and bodies were their absolute property not so many years ago. The nigger has learned to talk of his rights now. He didn't know the word then."

"Had enough to do to put up with his wrongs, eh?" laughed Hardy Kenyon.

"He'd have had no absurd fancies about wrongs, either, if he'd been let alone," retorted the other. "Why, man, he never was so lazy or so happy as he was in the good old days. He had no care. To eat and drink, and look

to his owner for everything he wanted, was the sum total of his life. Now he understands what cares and responsibilities mean. And his latest grievance is that he is not allowed to be equal to his master."

"Oh, equality won't satisfy him long," sneered Ted Renshaw, who formed one of the group. "What he'll want soon will be to govern us."

"Maybe, Mr. Renshaw, he'd be content with the chance to govern himself."

The speaker, a little hunchbacked man with eyes that looked out from beneath a pair of shaggy eyebrows with as merry a light as if those humped shoulders had not borne rather more than a fair share of life's burdens, stood on the outside of the group. He was not one of the men who had attended the planters' meeting. Not that Roderick Winslow was lacking in enthusiasm on any burning question of the day. On the contrary, the shoemaker's shop—for the little round-shouldered man was the maker and mender of footgear for his neighbours—was headquarters for all the argumentative county politicians who felt inclined to air their own ideas and imbibe new ones from this genius of the needle and awl. But Roderick owned no foot of land outside the garden that surrounded his house, and this had been a meeting of the landed proprietors.

"Govern himself! I wish he would," retorted Ted Renshaw, turning upon the shoemaker sharply. "I guess *you* know how far he is from doing that, eh, Rod? No; what he's after is equal rights with the white man. And there are fools that would give them to him. Give a nigger the same privileges we enjoy! Why, man, you might as well give those privileges to a monkey."

"Not quite," said Cuthbert Ross quietly. "There are niggers and niggers, Ted."

"Oh, there are some a notch above the rest, I've no doubt," responded the young man. "But when it's all told, the best of 'em is a nigger still."

"Yes, and the nigger shall never rule in the South, not if he count ten for every one of us," said the planter who had first spoken. "Give the darky a vote, and he becomes the ruler by sheer force of numbers. And that he shall never be while the white men of the South are here to prevent it. We'll never submit to seeing him stand side by side with us and cast his vote as if it were his right."

"Why not?" asked Hardy Kenyon.

"Why not? Because he's not fit for it, and never will be. Uprightness and rectitude are foreign to the nature of a black man. He's as treacherous as a snake. He couldn't cast an honest vote if he saw a chance to make a dollar by casting a dishonest one. Never did and never will, as long as he's a darky."

"There you go! That's the way with you all. You take a white man on his own merits, and a darky on the merits of his race. As long as he's a darky he can't be anything good. While his skin is black, you charge every sin of every man of his people against him."

Roderick Winslow edged his way into closer proximity to the last speaker, and stood with eyes alight for battle, waiting for his reply.

"Well, and ain't there enough bad darkies to justify us?"

It was Ted Renshaw who turned upon the shoemaker with a laugh that was more than half a sneer.

"Bad darkies!" The little roundbacked man warmed with the words, and pushed in nearer to the centre of the group. "Likely there are. There are bad men of all races, more's the pity, and when you're taking into consideration the lower strata of society, you'll be apt to find a fair proportion of the refuse there. But you don't condemn any other race as a whole because of the refuse at the bottom. What I complain of in you planters is that you refuse to consider the black man as a man, and insist on taking him as a darky. Because he's a darky, he must

of necessity have the faults of every other darky, and he can never rise above them."

"Bless you, he's got them, sure enough. They come to him with his skin."

The man who spoke brought his hand down good-naturedly on the shoemaker's shoulder, and laughed.

"That's it. And while he's got a black skin you deny him the privileges every other man in this land enjoys. He can't be worthy of them, because he's black. That's where you set all impartial men against you. A man's rights don't in any way depend on his skin. Don't make it a question of colour. I don't know but a black rogue is just about as good as a white rogue any day. If it's a question of rascality, I'm with you. But it don't make any difference to the question whether the rascal is a black rascal or a white one. Be consistent, man, every time."

"Consistent! Yes. We all know where your consistency would lead you. You'd hand over this land to a set of beggars that wouldn't care a toss what became of it if they could get a good square meal by hook or by crook to-day. You'd give a horde of darkies a vote, and then shake your head and declare that the consequences were inevitable."

"Should I? Well, now, I ain't so sure of that," said Roderick, with a reflective smile. "You're settling my opinion a little offhand. I ain't saying every coloured man should have a vote, and I ain't saying every white man should have a vote. That's for the deep thinkers of this land of ours to work out. It's a question—there's no denying it's a question. In the old lands, where one man for certain *ain't* another man's equal, they say them that has the most at stake has the right to have the most to say in the government. That's so, but even then it depends on how you look at it. Over here we kinder don't admit that a man's property is the biggest thing he's got at stake. There's his liberty, and his home, and the well-being of his wife and

little uns. There's himself. Them's the biggest things to us, and we count 'em a heap more than money and lands. Well, sir, ain't a coloured man got his little cabin where his wife and young uns are looking out for him? Ain't he got them at stake? And ain't he a man same as the rest? He's a bad un sometimes. Yes, sir, he is. But we ain't never *said* yet in our laws that bad uns shouldn't have the franchise. When we've said *that,* I'm going to give in to it and stick to it. But don't say the coloured man hasn't got just about as much at stake as the white man. Serve 'em alike all round, and then there won't be no chance for the older nations to kinder throw sneers at us as a young upstart country that's making a pretty botch of carrying out the broad, large-hearted policy she set herself to establish before the world. We ain't babies, sir. This United States ain't a toddler. She's going to shew the nations, but it would be just as well she shouldn't give 'em the chance to smile indulgently at her weakness when it comes to applying her principles to the big questions of government. We ain't had so much experience as some of 'em, but we've got the principle in us. Yes, sir, and the right principle in us—the downright feeling of justice that won the day for us agin the Britisher. That feeling's got to settle this race question. Why, there ain't no other way for us to settle it. Go back on our principles as a nation? Say we war'n't right when we whipped the Englishman, and it wasn't a universal principle we fought for, but just our own gain? Say it don't hold to-day as much as it did then? No, sir—not the Americans."

At this juncture a mocking laugh from the lips of Ted Renshaw broke in on the shoemaker's rush of words. For a minute or two his vehemence had carried all before it. He was warming to his subject, and when Roderick Winslow grew warm it was not easy to stop the flow of his language.

"You may laugh, young sir," he said. "Lots of people have laughed at this juvenile country before now. The

Britisher laughed—or maybe he sneered—but he looked mighty foolish in the end. And there's the fool's place for every man that casts a slur by word or by act on the abiding principles of this United States. And it is casting a slur on us to do anything that makes us stand out before the world as a people that talk mighty good, but fail when it comes to practice. America ain't going to fail. She always comes out right, and she'll come out right on the race question. How do I know? We've got the principle in us, sir. We *believe* that every man is free and has equal rights, and what we believe we shall act up to yet, if a few of us *are* a little swayed by selfish looking at the consequences to our own little bits of interests. Yes, sir, America will come out right yet. When she said to the Britisher, 'No taxation without representation,' she *meant* it, sir; not just for herself at the moment, but as a great standing principle. She set it up before the world then, and she's kept it there. Why, bless you, the Britisher's learned a good bit of that lesson himself since then. *He* don't try to keep nigh as many of his feller-men without that representation as he used to do. Are we going to shew ourselves behind him by refusing it to a race *as* a race, and not as individuals that we've decided ain't worthy of it? If we, calmly and justly as becomes our great nation, sit down and consider, and decide that no ruffian and no double-dealing man shall have the franchise, and that deciding shuts out a half of the black people—and maybe a long way on toward half of the white—there ain't nobody going to say we've subverted the principles our fathers fought for. But we ain't going to strike an annihilating blow at the very foundation we stand on. Not if we know it, sir. America will come out right, but there's a pressing danger that some of the hot-headed ones should let their feelings run away with their principles, and if we let them lead us we shall surely repent of it. We shall come out anyhow. We can't help it, because we're Americans.

But we don't want to come through oppression, and bloodshed, and hardness. We don't want to stain our name first. I ain't fearing for America in the end. Old Glory'll win, but don't let's drag her in shame. No, sir. Respect her and her principles. She's *got* 'em."

He stopped from sheer lack of breath. When he began his harangue it was in an eager but quiet voice, and with a little picking of words. Before he had finished, the words tumbled out as they would. Roderick Winslow was nothing if not enthusiastic. His neighbours were accustomed to his vehemence, but no sooner did he give way so far as to let other voices be heard, than half a dozen were raised in protest. Like the shoemaker, the Southern planters were not short of words, and they used them with a vigour that was sufficiently convincing of their profound interest in the subject under discussion. "Maudlin sentiment;" "subversive of all decent government;" "degrading to the South;" "an insult to every Southerner;" "a visionary scheme that had been tried and that had exploded;" "a dream of fools;" were a few of the expressions that went flying around during the next few minutes.

"Hold on!" cried Hardy Kenyon, when the chorus had waxed and waned and grown loud again. "Don't annihilate Rod completely. I'm with him in more than one point of that harangue."

"No doubt. No doubt," came from half a dozen voices sarcastically.

"I don't know that I care anything about the nigger any more than any other man," continued Hardy. "He's none too deserving. When you come to standing out for a deserving race, you've got to look further than this world to find it. Why, bless you, if you go in for that kind of a test, this American race—I mean the part of it that arrogates to itself the name of American; the white and distinctly superior part—this American race has got to go under. Can't come up to it. No, sir. We've got

a good side to us; an amazing good side—and we know it, and don't let the world forget it—but there's a terrible big share of the shady side too, and it's as American as the other. We're not going to admit that the American race is past redemption, though, because there's a bad streak here and there. No, sir, we look at the good and shout 'Victory!' and we're more likely to come to it than if we squint all day at the specks and blotches of evil among us. Give the nigger the benefit of the same treatment. Maybe he's not so much worse than some of the rest. He's got his faults, and plenty of them, but if we stopped squinting at *them,* we might see he'd got a few virtues along with them."

"Oh, trust you two for clinging together," retorted the old planter who began the controversy. "You've both been tainted with the cursed cant that's done all the mischief here in the South till you've lost your appreciation of the fitness of things."

"The fitness of things, eh?" returned Hardy Kenyon good-humoredly. "Why that's the very point I'm aiming at. It isn't fit that we as a nation should be the laughing stock of the world. And how can we expect to be any other while we present to it a spectacle of inconsistency?"

"Inconsistency, sir!"

The speaker glared at Hardy Kenyon, and met a mocking smile.

"Yes, inconsistency," he repeated. "We set out from the beginning as a nation with principles. Yes, principles. It's our distinguishing characteristic among the nations, sir. And it's these principles I care about. I'd give the devil his rights, if he could prove his claim to them, rather than let this mighty republic lie under the ban of hypocrisy. We prate of freedom, and say it is the right of humanity. Well, isn't the nigger human? But we set our heel on him, and relegate him to the place of a dog and not a man. We send our ships

across the sea to free the victims of Spanish oppression, and keep the victims of our own oppression in the midst of us. What is oppression if it's not refusing to let a man be a man among other men?"

"You'll never make a man, in the sense you mean, out of the nigger," shouted an irate planter. "It isn't in him."

"There you go," retorted Hardy Kenyon, with an amused smile. "How do you know it isn't in him? How do you know what's in him and what isn't? Did we develop all our virtues in thirty-odd years? How do you know what the black man will be in years to come? You allow no time for his evolution. His is to be a Jack-and-the-bean-stalk sort of development. No, sir, you don't know, for you've never had the patience to wait and see. Because he hasn't reached the highest plane of moral worth at one jump, you deny him another chance. And then I suppose you claim that as a nation we are consistent. Teach those half savages over in Luzon self-government—that's what we are after, and a mighty fine deed it is, too—and tell the nigger he has no right to dream of self-government. His dreams are so many insults to us as a superior race. We'll govern him—with a rod of iron, if he doesn't look well to his ways. What does he want a voice in the government for? Can't he trust the white men? He may—trust them to burn him if their passions are sufficiently aroused, for a passion-dominated white man can be as near a fiend as a black one any day. Yet we distinctly deny to the black man the right to have suspicions of his white neighbour. He must trust him and be governed by him. For the white men, as a whole, are his friends."

"Well, and isn't that the truth?" broke in several voices at once. "Where has he got better friends than the white men of the South? Haven't we proved ourselves his friends time and again?"

"Truly you have," acknowledged Hardy. "And I be-

lieve that, as a whole, the white men are friendly to him. But it is not the whole he has to deal with, for the whole never acts. It is the rougher and more hostile element that acts, and those who love the negro, and in whom he is told to put his trust, sit down and sigh, and lament the rashness of the minority, and predict that such violence will yet die a natural death. And the nigger is expected to find comfort in such sighs and promises of future safety, and to go on trusting. It is a proof of his mental and moral degradation if he do not."

It is not to be supposed that Hardy Kenyon had not met with more than one interruption before he succeeded in delivering himself of such obnoxious opinions. That he had a strong voice, and plenty of determination, was accountable for the fact that he still held the floor.

His sentiments were fairly well known among his neighbours. On ordinary occasions they shrugged their shoulders, laughed, and vowed you couldn't make a downright Southerner of Kenyon. If he lived for a millenium in the South, he'd never get rid of those levelling notions he had brought with him in the beginning. But he was a good fellow at heart.

To-night, however, the fact of his being a good fellow was not so prominent in the minds of his listeners. Feeling was running high, and there was an inclination to look on him and the shoemaker as traitors to the cause of the planters. Voices grew a little less under control than usual as the argument proceeded, and enough angry glances were levelled at Hardy Kenyon to make a sensitive man uncomfortable. Hardy was not sensitive. He warmed with the conflict.

"Where's your patriotism?" demanded the oldest planter of the company. "A pretty opinion you must have of the United States, if you think the black rascals that fill this South are fit to govern it."

"Are one-half the men that have a vote fit to govern?" interposed Roderick Winslow.

The speaker ignored his interruption.

"The greatest country on earth to be governed by a lot of black know-nothings that have no more morality than pigs!" he proceeded.

"Morality! How do you define that?" demanded Hardy Kenyon. "A shifting kind of thing in these modern times, isn't it? The black fellers haven't got it, and wanting it, are unfit to rule. Man, I believe that ethically you are right. Who, then, *is* fit? That's the question. The men that go out, *masked,* in gangs, to waylay black men, and—well, shew them the superiority of the white race by whipping, torturing, and murdering? I suppose they're fit—anyhow, they are allowed to have a voice in governing."

"Hold on. A man doesn't get lynched unless he's pretty strongly suspected of deserving it. The men you are defending are criminals, and have no right to be at large," cried a chorus of indignant voices.

"Pretty strongly suspected, eh!" chuckled Hardy. "And hasn't a man that's 'pretty strongly suspected' a right to be tried in a lawful manner by his peers, and if he's sentenced to death, hasn't he a right to die by the hand of the law? Why, men, I've as much right to be hanged decently and in order, if I deserve it, as I have to be protected from a mob if I am innocent."

"Bah! what a fuss to make about a criminal. So long as he gets his deserts, we won't grumble at the way they come," sneered Ted Renshaw.

"Criminal, do you say?" returned Hardy, with a smile that had in it a suggestion of triumph. "What's your definition of a criminal? The man that breaks the law of the land? There's an old law, made before the United States was born, that says 'Thou shalt not kill.' It has been embodied in pretty nearly every civilized code. There are not many lands where it is *lawful* to kill. In the United States, also, the law forbids a man, or a company of men, to take the life of another. Who then

are these bands—not so uncommon now that the news of their deeds awakens any very serious concern—who go out, armed, for the purpose of killing men contrary to the law of the land? Must be those black rascals you are talking about—those fellows who are not fit to have a share in the government. Truly you are right there. Men who will subvert, or violently break, the law, are *not* fit to govern. Take away the vote from such, by all means. He who will not respect the laws of the land has no right to expect to help make the laws. Deprive him of the franchise. Let us be purged of all voters who are not law respecters. Let this great land be governed only by men who are *fit* to vote. Exclude every law breaker and every law weakener, every man whose vote can be bought, and every man who has any hand in trying to buy a vote, as well as every man who is led by bosses or influenced unfairly. I'm with you in purifying the ballot by curtailing the list of those who vote to the extent of cutting off every unfit man. But do it all round. Impartiality is the soul of justice, and this United States was founded to give all men equal privileges. Rod Winslow has got the hang of it there. 'No taxation without representation,' you know. We as a people won't stand it—never would. Equality of privilege everywhere —one treated the same as the other."

"Look here, Hardy, you don't practise what you preach. You don't treat other men as you make them treat you. There's no equality of privilege here just now. You've got the floor, and you've held it—when other people wanted a chance. Shut up, now. You've said enough —and more."

Cuthbert Ross gave his friend a slap on the back that almost knocked the breath out of him. He saw that the point of amicable discussion had long been passed, and he had not a very high opinion of Hardy Kenyon's discretion when once his tongue was in full swing. Hardy was not looking at consequences. In moments like these,

men had before now been provoked to words and acts that left bitter memories. Kenyon should remember that these planters felt strongly on the question under discussion, argued Cuthbert Ross, and that there are two ways of looking at all things—even a truth. Hence his interruption.

"All right, old friend," said Hardy good-naturedly. "I've said my say. Now pitch into me as much as you like. I'm game."

"That's more than we shall any of us be to-morrow if we don't go home," replied Mr. Ross. "Gentlemen, are you aware that we have kept this office open until past eleven o'clock?"

"Keep it open till twelve if you like," said the postmaster. "Public-spirited men like yourselves need never lack a place to talk things over in. These are times that call for men of action."

"We've got them, Mr. Giles," called out Ted Renshaw significantly.

"I believe you, sir," replied the postmaster, with a grin.

They turned out into the night, and Cuthbert Ross linked his arm in that of Hardy Kenyon.

"Walk home with me, you hot-headed reformer," he said, "and don't pour any more oil on the troubled flames to-night."

Hardy laughed, and for a good half of the length of their walk neither spoke. It was Cuthbert Ross who broke the silence.

"You Northerners think you're the only people who care for the old flag," he said, lifting up his face toward the stars and speaking slowly. "Thunder and lightning! You don't know what care for it means. What did *you* give up for it?"

"Not much," replied Kenyon sarcastically. "We only took our lives in our hands."

"Your lives!" repeated Cuthbert Ross scornfully. "Man alive, what were they? We took our prejudices

in our hands. Life isn't a fleabite by the side of a man's prejudices. He'll risk the one for the merest trifle, but the other he sticks to like the skin on his body. When he tosses his prejudices aside, flings them away like a ball kicked out of the road, you may wager all you possess there's something back of the action that's stirred his soul. Your lives! What's a paltry life by the side of plucking out the pride that's deep as a man's being? Bless you, we got that pride from our fathers and our grandfathers. It's a part of us, and it was that we sacrificed when we fought for the old flag."

"Cuthbert Ross," said Kenyon, standing still in the darkness, "I know what *you* sacrificed when you came out on the side of the Union."

"No, you don't," replied his friend. "You are thinking of lands and possessions. They are the smallest part of the business. We are a proud race—we Southerners. We don't like to be dictated to, and we don't like this theory of equality. We *did* like our life of ruling and being served. It suited our habits and our pride. It did not cost us a little to give it up."

"You're right. I guess I'm a bit of a brute," said Hardy, with an odd kind of a laugh. "These theories of mine are very much essentials to me. I suppose I don't realize that they look different to a Southerner. Maybe it's not generous to drive them home too freely. But this question is not altogether one of sentiment, or of neighbourly charity. There's justice for the black race as well as sympathy with the white to be considered. And in most of these cases it is the black man who is likely to suffer."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"I SHO' never see sich a change in no gal in my life. She ain't a quarter the Magnolia what went away. Lor, 'fore she tuk up with that school she knowed what *dressin'* meant. Now she ain't got nary thing but two colours on her, and there ain't nothin' strikin' about *them.*"

The speaker, one of the dark belles of Hebron, tossed her feather-bedecked head and laughed till her white teeth flashed in the sunlight.

"She cert'nly is 'mazin' wantin' in some ob de mo' strikin' char'taristics ob our race," said an old negress with white woolly hair peeping out from beneath a badly tied and very gay bandanna. "Seems like de white folks at dat Fiske had done planed off all de outstandin' pints ob de nigger nature. Lor, she des carry herself so plumb like a white woman, and hev de 'zact sim'lar movements, dat if I was passin' ob her in a crowd ob mixed niggers and whites I'd sho' pull my ole duds 'way from touchin' her, thinkin' she was a white woman. I cert'nly would, chile. Dar's de glide and de swish ob de white woman from de head to de toe ob dat gal."

"There now, that's jest it. She ain't neither one nor t'other. I'd ruther be a nigger all through than be white outside and a nigger in," protested the dark belle, with another toss of the dilapidated feathers on her hat.

"I'se not plumb convinced dat dey-uns ain't planed off 'bout as much ob de nigger from de inside as from de outside," said the old negress reflectively. "Chile, dar's outside movements what's neider more nor less dan de 'spression ob de inside bein'. Dat gal's done lost de niggerness what was in her. She done got 'pregnated wid de whiteness ob dey white people what teached her. She

Magnolia Boyd, sho' nuff, but she not de same Magnolia what went away."

"Bless de Lord, no! She sho' ain't. What for did I send my lil' gal all dat long ways 'cross de big world if she come back de same Magnolia? I no fool nigger."

Uncle Pete laughed, and rubbed his hands and laughed again.

"Lor, I feel like laughin' inside all de day," he said. "De Lord He mighty good to dis ole darky. He let him see de light of his eyes agin, and dat light shinin' so bright he jest not able take his eye 'way from it. Why, dat lil' gal what I sent 'way off 'cross de lonesome world all by herself, she done come back 'most a woman. And she have de beginnin' of de great things in her—for herself and for her people. She been teached and helped powerful much, and yet she my lil' gal all de same. Her heart sho' turn to Uncle Pete same as in de years dat are past, and she not dazzled by no highness and displayin'. She my lil' modest Magnolia. She not larn no bold ways, nor no flauntin' ways. She not think she sot up 'bove de rest of our race. She sho' know a heap, but she begin her larnin' at de right end. She larn one thing 'fore all de rest, and dat am dat de man or woman what git so high dat dey seems 'way up 'bove dey fellers, hasn't clumb de width of a hair from de low-down persition what's every man and woman's place when de good God look down 'pon 'em. My Magnolia she been teached by dem white people at dat school to look up'ard. Dar no 'spicion of pride in dem what look dat away. Lor, how could dar be? Dey's lookin' at de infinite, and dey feels jes' like a speck o' dust in de sunlight deyselves. I'se sho' more'n satisfied wid de 'speriment I made when I send de light o' my eyes away."

There was much difference of opinion in Hebron over the result of this same experiment. The coloured population came, ceremoniously and unceremoniously, to inspect Magnolia and all her possessions, to question her as to her

doings, and to criticise her generally. It was not Magnolia Boyd alone who was on trial. The whole University of Fiske, with all its work, was being weighed in the balance.

"Dar sho' ain't nigh so much of her as dar was 'fore she went away," was the more general verdict.

One or two laughed significantly.

"Dar de muchness of de big, swellin' words an' looks," remarked a representative of this class, "an' dar de muchness of de inside bigness. I'se not presumin' to say dat gal ain't growed on de inside a mighty sight."

Magnolia spent her summer in the old haunts, picking cotton with the rest, and wearying many a day for a sight of Gloss going up and down the cotton row. She said little, but Uncle Pete saw the sorrow in her eyes. When autumn came, he walked once more to the nearest station and put his "lil' gal" on the train.

"You'll sho' be safe dis time, honey," he said. "Dat good friend of Gloss's, he come and take you out of dis yere puffin' and tearin' consarn befo' de night am far advanced, an' he see to it you not take no harm when you starts agin. I cert'nly am glad you gwine stay wid his mammy a piece. It'll break de journey into slices what ain't so plumb wearisome and confusin' like. Your head sho' get time to rest de thump and de roar out of it befo' you start off agin. Honey, take keer of yerself. Old Uncle Pete'll pray—and he'll trust, too. He's lookin' for great things, chile."

Magnolia felt the tears welling up into her eyes. And then the train started, and the tears were gone, and she was thinking of the night. For it was to be spent in the home of her brother's friend, Free Stanlin. Mrs. Stanlin had insisted that "the sister of that po' chile Gloss shouldn't never be 'lowed to pass within three miles of her house and not come and rest herself. It's not fit for her to be ridin' in them cars a nights," she declared. "There's niggers and white men, both, that ain't got no sense o'

decency. And a girl that's by herself ain't none too safe among 'em, 'spech'ly if there's nigger blood in her so's she ain't free to ride nowheres but in the nigger car."

"She's white enough to ride anywhere," said Free. "Nobody would know she belonged to our race."

"She don't do it, though. I reckon she feels like me," returned Betsey quickly. "If I was as white as the whitest of 'em, I wouldn't go in one of their cars while they shet out them that was my friends. Stealin' some of their privileges 'cause I wasn't as dark as the rest wouldn't make me feel no better. What they warn't willin' to give I cert'nly shouldn't be willin' to take by no accident o' colour. If it's a disgrace to be a nigger, and the Lord made me a nigger, I ain't goin' to slide out o' that disgrace by no little crack that would let me through and wouldn't let through them I loved. I reckon Magnolia feels jest about as I do. She feels like standin' where the Lord put her. But there ain't no needcessity for her to be in them cars all night. She can sleep here, and take some rest for a few days. Po' lonesome chile! She sure misses her brother sore, I knows."

So many kindly messages came from the good woman, in the letter Free felt it necessary to write the day after his encounter with Magnolia, that within a week of her arrival at Hebron the girl had promised to break the return journey by a visit to Mrs. Stanlin. Motherly Mrs. Stanlin was heart free then. It was before her husband had promised to stand for magistrate. She had room in her thoughts for this girl in whom Free was interested.

It was perhaps not altogether strange that as the train bore Magnolia away from the familiar country around home, her thoughts should take a swift leap ahead, and bring before her a dark, handsome face, seen first in a moment of terror. That short journey taken together had put into the intercourse of these two a personal element it had hitherto lacked. The circumstances under which he had first addressed her had awakened in Free a

tender feeling toward this girl. He had changed all his plans in order to befriend her. He had gone out of his way to make arrangements for her comfort, and had given much thought to the best means of furthering her interests. In the letters that had passed between them he had necessarily gained a limited knowledge of her character. But when he looked into her face, quivering with the excitement of the moment, and listened to her low-spoken words of thanks, a new relation was established between them. The girl he saw then was the girl who henceforth took her place in his life as a personality, replacing the Magnolia of his fancy. At that moment he fervently thanked his friend Gloss for the trust he had reposed in him. Any element of sacrifice that had been part of the service changed its character at that time. It was not a duty, but a privilege, to be allowed to carry on this work that had dropped from his friend's hands.

The impression did not pass away with the night. Betsey Stanlin noted how the letters to Hebron increased in number and length during that summer, and she shook her head wisely.

"I'se wantin' to know that girl," she told her heart. "I'se sure wantin' to become acquainted with the woman that can touch further down than jest the outside o' my boy. I'se not wantin' any influence to come into his life that I ain't understandin'. There can't nothin' lay a hand on any part o' that chile's nature without reachin' plumb down to the bottom o' my heart. I sure got to know that girl."

"Mother, you will go with me to the station?" said Free on the morning of the day when Magnolia left Hebron to begin her second year at Fiske. "It will be late before the train gets in, but—all the more reason that there should be a woman waiting to greet her."

He spoke a little doubtfully.

"Go, honey! In course I'm goin'," said Betsey decisively. "Do you s'pose I ain't prepared to do for the

sister of that po' chile jest what I'd do for a girl of my own? She's got to be driven three miles in the night time. Course I'se goin' along."

Thus it happened that when Magnolia, a little tired and nervous at the end of her journey, rose to leave the train, a young man sprang up the steps of the car and hurried to meet her, and a face that she remembered well smiled upon her as Free said: "I'm so glad you came. My mother is impatient to welcome the sister of her boy Gloss. She is outside. Are these all the things you have?"

He possessed himself of them, and led the way to the platform. A good many curious glances followed the pair. There was a flush on the girl's cheeks and a light in the young man's eyes suggestive of more than ordinary pleasure in the meeting.

"Mother, she has come. I told her you were in a hurry to welcome her."

"That's right, chile. I is. Honey, you'se plumb welcome."

For a moment Magnolia saw a broad, comfortable-looking figure, and a motherly face with a pair of eyes that had a strange earnestness in their gaze as they fixed themselves upon her. Then she saw no more, for the comforting arms of Betsey Stanlin were around her, and she was drawn to the capacious breast.

"Honey, you'se sure got a lonesome look in your eyes," Betsey said. "Heartaches ain't counted as sickness, chile, but there's times when they'se sore in need of doctorin'. And you'se 'most tired to death, too. I know you is. Them cars is as tryin' as they'se dirty."

There was a quiver of the girl's lips as those arms released her, and a suspicious moisture in her eyes. In the poorly lighted station both passed unnoticed. With a sense of rest and relief she yielded herself to these friends who were almost strangers to her, but to whom she owed the change that had broadened her life.

It was not long before she found herself tucked into a

commodious, two-seated vehicle, bowling along behind a pair of well-groomed horses. She could not see much of the road, for the night was lighted only by the stars, but she knew that the reins were handled skilfully, and that there was a pleasurable sense of exhilaration in the swift motion.

And then she forgot the road and the horses as her eyes wandered to the stars overhead, and her thoughts went to the day when Gloss paid his first visit to the home that was opening to welcome her. For in low, sympathetic tones Free was telling her of that first walk from Tuskadela.

"And there's jest the feller of that turkey that was waitin' for their dinner doin' its last bit of brownin' in the oven now," interposed Betsey from the back seat. "West's cookin' it, and he's a plumb good hand at cookin' a turkey. We'se laid out to hev a late supper. We knowed you'd be nigh starved arter all that travellin'."

"You are very good," said Magnolia, with a little laugh that had a sob somewhere behind it.

"To ourselves," responded Free. "You don't know how glad we are to have you."

It was like turning her brother's letters into life to come up to that house, and see it in the memory of all it had appeared to Gloss. For he had written of it so fully that the girl knew it before she set foot upon its steps.

That night was the beginning of a week filled with tender memories, while it had in it also the gladness of new friendships. Before it was ended Magnolia knew that is was not simply a house that had opened to her, but the hearts of its inmates also.

"That boy Gloss sure didn't tell no lies," said West Stanlin, when the first evening meal was drawing to a close. "I thought maybe he was almost as partial where his sister was concerned as we are when it comes to dis-

cussin' our boy. I warn't just to him. He was a mighty sensible feller. He didn't say nary word too much."

He watched the colour come into the girl's cheeks at his words, and then laughed appreciatively.

And Free frowned ever so slightly, and turned the conversation into another channel. He was developing an unusual sensitiveness where this girl was concerned.

It did not take Magnolia a week to learn to love Betsey Stanlin. That good woman wrapped the girl about with motherly kindness from the moment she saw her in the station.

"I knowed from the first there was a mighty heap o' good in that po' chile's sister Magnolia, jest because his whole life was plumb set on her," she said confidentially. "Honey, there'd come a deep-down look in his eyes when he talked of his little sister. It must 'a had somethin' to feed on, that love what possessed him. I knowed long afore I seed you that you'd got a lovin' heart to answer to the love in his. But, chile, I wanted to see jest what you was like. I'm plumb glad you come. You belongs to us in a way, because Gloss give you to Free."

A quick flush rose to the girl's forehead.

"He has been very good to me," she said. "It has cost him so much."

"No, no, chile, he was glad to do it. He'll go to Fiske yet, if—"

She broke off. The fight over the election of magistrate was now in its early stages, and to Betsey's anxious eyes clouds loomed dark in the future. She felt the chill of a coming storm. Her plans all had an "if" in them now.

"It was very good of you to ask me here," said Magnolia. "Gloss loved so much to come, and for me it is entering into the piece of his life that I lost—no, the piece of my own life that was lost. I don't think I had a separate life till he went away. I did not think I could live without him."

Her voice, generally well under control, had a break in it. She stopped because she could not go on.

"Po' chile," said Betsey sympathetically. "I seed you knowed all about what a heartache meant that night when you come. Honey, this world ain't a land o' blessedness most times, not to the hearts that's real alive to pain. There's sorrers and losses strewed all the ways through it, and when you've done lifted your weary feet clear o' one difficulty, there's another right in the path."

There was a ring of sadness in Betsey's voice. The coming struggle was lying heavy on her heart. A feeling of danger that would not be thrown off damped the gladness of this week. For Betsey had determined it should be glad for Free and Magnolia, let the future bring what it would.

"What's the use frightin' them young things?" she said. "The troubles is plumb ahead. I knows it. But they ain't sufferin' yet, an' there ain't no sense in spilin' this week's happiness with next week's sorrer. They don't see the sorrer. I'm glad she come. My chile's happy and glad. It sure does me good to see the light in his eyes."

That light grew brighter as the days of Magnolia's visit went by. Betsey more than once forgot her forebodings in sharing her boy's gladness.

Free gave himself up to Magnolia's pleasure—and his own. On one of those days he drove her to Tuskadela. The drive was a very silent one. It did not trouble him much, however, that the girl's lips were closed. More than once their eyes met, and the look satisfied him as fully as words. They were sufficiently in sympathy now to let their thoughts run without speech in one direction. They were both thinking of Gloss.

Free contented himself with little attentions that added to the girl's comfort. For himself, he was satisfied to have her by his side. In the days since she came to them,

life had rounded out into something infinitely satisfactory to the young man.

Magnolia insisted on being set down outside the gates of Tuskadela.

"I want to see it just as he did," she said.

She stood long looking at the buildings devoted to the education of her race. When she turned her face toward Free it had grown very white.

"It is too much for you. I ought not to have brought you here," he said solicitously.

"No, no. I wanted to come. I would not miss it. But—I shall never leave off wanting him."

"We both want him," he said, and for a moment his fingers sought hers and closed about them. It was only for a moment, but the touch brought the blood back to her cheeks.

"We will go in," she said.

As long as she lived Magnolia never forgot that day. In the girls' hall the young women clustered about her and talked of Gloss. She went into the classrooms—where some of his hardest battles were fought—and into the agricultural building where he enlarged his ideas of farming. Last of all she stood in the little hospital. Her face was very still and set, but no tears swam in those far-seeing eyes. She was filling up the story of her brother's life—filling it to the very end. At last she turned to Free.

"I am ready to go now," she said.

Silently he put her into the vehicle, and as silently drove her home. During all the way back he busied himself with the horses. Only when he helped her out, he held her hand for a moment longer than was necessary.

"He has left his work to us," he said.

It was strange how much comfort Magnolia found in the wording of that little sentence.

## CHAPTER XIX.

In due time the elections came on. The coloured men turned out in such force that their vote could not be set aside, and West Stanlin was elected magistrate. Then feeling broke bounds. The black men went wild with joy, and the white men with anger. A sane, dispassionate weighing of events was out of the question. Everybody felt too strongly to be able to reason strongly. A local gain became in the estimation of both sides a national victory.

It was at this juncture that the war waxed really hot. Though West Stanlin was elected, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that he would ever sit in judgment on the law breakers of the community. The white men had not come to the end of their resources yet.

The planters of the immediate neighbourhood were not the only men who were aroused to anger. The feeling spread in an intensified form to Pine Ridge, and the white men of that populous village held a mass meeting, at which some strong words were used. The villagers urged the planters to uphold the dignity of the ruling race by seeing to it that the magistracy was not disgraced by having a nigger in its ranks, and they promised all possible support, moral and physical, in the struggle. As a result of the consultation, the magistrate's bond was set at so high a figure that none but West Stanlin himself could reach it. That energetic negro promptly mortgaged his farm, placed the sum required in a bank so as to secure the bondsmen, and awaited events.

They came quickly. On an evening when West Stanlin was walking across the fields after twilight fell, a

bullet whizzed past him close enough to tear a hole through the pocket of his coat. The next, better aimed, travelled with stinging force over the region of his heart, ploughing through the flesh and inflicting a surface wound. The sharp sting of the bullet aroused the planter to anger. He was no coward, this black man who had opposed himself against the prejudices of his neighbours, and it was not from, but toward, the shooter that he ran. Another shot and another came in quick succession. Then a man fled in hot haste. It was not West Stanlin.

That was the beginning of a tumult of hatred and passion and fear that swept through the region lying between the plantation of West Stanlin and Pine Ridge. It was generally believed that the assailant of the coloured planter had come from the village. Terror seized upon the more timid negroes. The bolder among them were stirred to anger.

"They done thought that if they couldn't beat us with a 'lection, they could do it plumb easy with a bullet. We'se sho' got to look out," declared one of the latter.

The news that West Stanlin had been shot at spread fast and far. That night, when all the world had grown still, stealthy figures crept out into the darkness. They came for miles through the night, with a silent determination that took no account of distance. From lonely cabins in the swamp, and from neighbourhoods more populous, they turned out in ones and twos and threes, moving toward a common centre. Here and there, where two streams met, a whispered greeting and a low growling menace of words disturbed the silence for the space of a minute. Then all was still again, till the converging streams met about a cabin set deep in the shelter of the forest. Not less than four hundred men surrounded that cabin on the night in question, and there was not a white face among them. And then voices rose in speech, and with a vehemence in proportion to the strong check he had put upon the outward expression of his feelings, the

negro, in the person of the more eloquent of his representatives, embodied his indignation in words, and fanned the flame of passion till it broke into a sullen roar.

"Dey-uns beginned de fightin'," said a deep, hoarse voice. "Dey-uns drawed de fust blood. If de nigger foller atter, and draw it till it well out o' de heart o' de white man in a crimsonin' stream, dar ain't no right thinkin' cit'zen what could lay any blame to de charge o' de nigger. He gwine do nothin' but foller de leadin' o' de white men."

"Sho' a nigger can tote a weapon as well as a white man," cried another voice. "We can git us guns from somewheres, an' shoot from de bush 'bout as safe as a white man can. Dar no s'perior race when it comes to squenchin' out lives. Frien's, is we gwine to see dat public-spir'ted cit'zen, West Stanlin, knocked into 'blivion by de sneakin' bullet what darsn't come into de light, or is we gwine stan' by him, an' draw blood for blood?"

"Blood!" shrieked a woman's voice. "It'll sho' flow in streams. We'se gwine be murdered in our beds; we'se gwine be mowed down by de white men like grass stalks; we'se gwine see our lil' chillens layin' dead afore our eyes. Frien's, we'se sho' fell on troub'lous times. Dar's trib'lation a-comin' to we-uns. Ah, me!"

Her wail rang out on the night air, pulsating in the ears of that crowd of negroes till it set the brain of every man on fire. There was no lack of speech now. The bitterness that had been gathering strength through the past months found voice, and in all the throng there was none to calm the tumult by recalling the friendly relations hitherto existing between the two races, and counselling the safer victory to be gained by patience.

Retaliation was the burden of every speech, and only fear restrained. The ground of confidence was the strength of numbers that could be set against the strength of influence.

"Dey white men think dey de whole blessed South,"

said an old negro loudly. "Lor, de nigger take dem in his arms an' sweep dem plumb out o' dis yere land. He *able* to do it. He sho' is."

"Don' you make no mistake dar," quickly responded a still older negro. "Don' you know dar a mighty big lot o' *power* in a white man? Brudders, we'se in de 'jority, sho', but it ain't so powerful certain dat when it comes to de life and death struggle de white man can't push de hardest. Don' be too venturingsome, brudders. We'se many in numbers, but de white man is many in de resources what he's got. If we-uns gits a-fightin' wid him, I'se powerful scart o' de result. I sho' am. I'se wid ye, brudders, but I'se fearin' de outcomin' of dis yere fightin' 'gainst de white men."

"Fightin'! Who's doin' de fightin'?" demanded a voice from the darkness. "Did we-uns sling a bullet at a man from behind a bush?"

"We-uns ain't gwine give way dis time, let troub'lous days come as fast as de clouds what gathers a-front ob de wind," declared another. "We gwine carry dis thing plumb through. West Stanlin he gwine be a magistrate if we-uns has to stan' guard over him from de arliest peep o' day to de blackness o' night. Dey white men think dey can fright West. Lor, dey not knowin'. Dar come de crack o' doom for some o' dem venturesome ones if dey not take care."

That they had not frightened West Stanlin was attested by the determined face of the planter when, his assailant having taken to his heels, he presented himself before Betsey with the words:

"Betsey, woman, I reckon you'd better get a bowl o' water. There's done been a few bullets wasted, and there's maybe a little blood wants washin' off."

A look of horror crossed the good woman's face.

"It's the beginnin'," she said, in a low, troubled voice. "I sure knowed it would come. There's sufferin' around and ahead. Is you hurted sore?"

West laughed.

"It smarts well," he said.

When Betsey saw how narrowly that bullet had escaped the heart, her hands trembled.

"The good God help us," she said. "There's sure no other help. Them white folks is plumb determined that bein' a magistrate is steppin' out of his place for a black man. They won't never 'low it to be, not if they has to move heaven and earth to stop it."

West Stanlin set his teeth together.

"I'm goin' on with this to the end, let the end be what it will," he said.

Betsey uttered no other word. She washed and bound up the wound.

"You better go to bed," she said. "I reckon they won't shoot no more to-night."

Free was not quite as cool as his father. The sturdy planter set a dogged determination against this fresh phase of violence. In his son it produced irritation.

"A coward that dare not come out in fair fight!" he fumed. "I wish—"

He broke off, and walked up and down the room.

"Sit down, boy," said West grimly. "This isn't goin' to be settled to-night—nor to-morrow. Take your time. You'll have plenty of it to understand the methods of the white men in."

"Father," said Free, after a minute's silence, "what do you think about going away for a time? You mean to serve as magistrate, but until the preliminaries are settled, it might be as well to keep out of the way. It is playing into their hands to let them end this controversy with a bullet."

West laughed.

"This nigger never run away from no danger since he was a pickaninny," he said, "and he ain't goin' to begin now."

"You go to bed, father," said Betsey anxiously. "That

wound'll heal better if you keep still. It ain't goin' to be fit for you to be out o' doors for a day or two."

West smiled. He understood the little ruse to keep him from danger.

Nevertheless he went to bed, and before the stream of stealthy figures began to pierce the darkness of night he was dreaming of bullets and assailants. Not so Betsey. She lay awake, looking into the darkness—not the physical darkness alone, but the darkness of the immediate future that held possibilities of being broken with lightening flashes of terror.

"It's closin' round, and it's full of sorrer and pain," she said.

She could not have told what it was that a few minutes later caused her to rise softly and stand by the window. She was not distinctly conscious of any sound, yet she felt that somebody was near. Her eyes fixed themselves upon a corner of the farmyard that was a short cut to the fields beyond. It was too dark to distinguish anything clearly, but as she stood there, it seemed to Betsey that once and again that space for a moment acquired an added darkness by reason of a dense body passing across it. There came a moment when a figure, hastily crossing the corner, was arrested by the falling of a hand. The night traveller was too thoroughly startled to notice that the hand was hot and trembling.

"What's you doin' here? This ain't no time to be hangin' round people's yards."

Betsey's voice was low, but it was not wanting in determination.

"Hush! You needn't to be scared," replied the intruder, in a mysterious whisper. "We ain't hangin' round. We'se gwine organize. We'se gwine pertect West. We'se gwine assert our rights. We'se gwine—lor, dar ain't no tellin' what we *is* gwine to do."

"Is you goin' to be wise, honey?" asked Betsey solemnly. "Is you goin' to do what you won't hev no sorrer for

when the doin's over? We'se sure come to the time when we-uns needs wisdom. Is you goin' to seek it? The God that knows the endin' from the beginnin' guide you-uns to-night. If we-uns steps out the wrong way jest now, there ain't no tellin' what gulf o' sorrer we shall find yawnin' at our feet. Be plumb careful, honey, for West's sake as well as for the sake of your babies at home. You sure got them to think of."

Betsey turned and went back into the house. She watched no more that night, for she knew that other eyes than hers were watchful.

When morning dawned she had nothing to say about the night hours. She set breakfast on the table, but made no attempt to touch it herself. Before it was ended a negro presented himself.

"West, we'se heared of the doin's yesterday, and we'se done looked into things," he said impressively. "There's a few hunderds of us gwine to see 'bout this free shootin'. We done instituted a sort o' body guard. There ain't no call for you to hide. We—"

"Hide!" shouted the planter, with a strength of voice that had the effect of causing his visitor to retreat a dozen steps. "Do you-uns think West Stanlin's the man to hide from a sneakin', runaway shooter?"

"No, sah, we don't," replied the negro, a grin broad enough to appease even a coloured planter whose valour had been called in question, appearing on his face. "But we-uns was a-considerin' whether it wouldn't be 'spedient for you to look to the savin' of your skin before you tuk thought for the savin' of your feelin's. We argied this away, that it might be the part o' wisdom to git shet o' pride for a space, and look at things from the pint o' view of safety. And we done decided by a 'nanimous vote that wisdom didn't pint that away. We settled it that we-all, the coloured population of this pertic'ler neighbourhood, was enough to pertect you from all harm; that we warn't gwine to be druv no longer, nor frighted, nor dictated

to by no white men that was a heap lesser in numbers than we-uns; and that we-all is gwine shew 'em. We'se done decided we'se gwine to hev our rights. We'se gwine hev a magistrate of our own race, and we'se gwine see nobody don't hurt him."

"I reckon not," said the planter quietly. "I reckon I can protect myself."

"No, you can't. You look here, West." The visitor approached more closely and assumed an argumentative attitude. "I speaks to you as to a reasonerble man. Has you got eyes in de back o' your head? Can you see side and front and behind at one and de same time? What you needs, West, is eyes all around you. Well, we'se sot ourselves to be them eyes. You go out in your fields same as common, and we-uns will watch. If ary man comes this away with a gun, if ary man that ain't got no reg'lar bisness comes this away at all, if ary man in ary way tries mischief, we-uns will inquire into his bisness and find out his intentions. We won't disconvenience no man more'n necessary, but we'll see all s'picious characters off this plantation and plumb out o' these parts. We'se 'pinted a committee, West, and done planned it all. If them white people keeps peaceful, we ain't gwine make no discomposure. But if they-uns begins kickin', we-uns gwine kick back, sho'."

"Look here," said West Stanlin, rising and standing before his visitor. "Do I look like a man that's afraid to walk through his own fields? Do I look—"

"Lor, West, nobody was a-sayin' you looked nothin'," replied the negro pacifically. "That ain't the question. It's a sneak shot that's the pint o' discussion. It'll sho' riddle a brave man's skin jes' as quick as a coward's. It ain't nary thing to do with you-uns' courage or you-uns' feelin's. We-uns is gwine to watch. That's all."

And they did watch. And it so happened that when a certain white man from the neighbourhood of Pine Ridge essayed to shoulder his gun and walk over to the planter's

house for the avowed purpose of having a talk with him, he got no nearer than a quarter of a mile of his destination before he was accosted by a black man.

"Good mornin', sah. Is you lookin' for anybody, sah?" civilly inquired the negro.

"What's that to you? Mind your own business," snapped the other.

"Yes, sah. I is, sah," was the ready response. "I'se the servant of the gen'leman what lives in yonder house, sah. It my bisness to ask what you want wid him, sah."

The stranger stared.

"My business is with West Stanlin," he said.

"Yes, sah. Very good, sah," responded the black man.

"Is he in the house?"

"No, sah. Not jes' now, sah. If you'se wantin' plumb bad to see him, come this away, sah."

The white man gave the negro a sharp look. It met nothing but an innocent smile. Thereupon he followed his guide, fingering his gun the while affectionately.

He was not very well pleased at the turn affairs had taken. He was anxious to see West Stanlin—very anxious. If this nigger should play him false—

"He'd ought to be somewheres not a great ways from here," said the coloured man, stopping before a small, log barn. "Go right in, sah. He keeps his fodder at de furder end. Maybe if you walks round you'll find him."

The stranger stepped inside the small, closely boarded building. It was a very secure building, stout logs forming the inside, and well nailed boards covering it without. It boasted of no window, but it made up in strength of door for any other deficiency. When that door swung to, as it did immediately after the entrance of the white man, and the key turned in the lock, the little log barn was as strong a prison as a jubilant negro could desire for the incarceration of an enemy.

"You better wait dar for West Stanlin, sah," said the

negro, in a loud, clear voice. "It a mighty safe place to wait in, sah."

The white man swore, and threatened to shoot, and swore again. Then he carried his threat into execution. A thundering reverberation deafened him. It was all the satisfaction his expenditure of powder and lead brought him.

Was the negro still there? He could not tell. The bullet hole afforded a field of view much too circumscribed to settle that question satisfactorily. An increase in the number of holes produced a corresponding increase in points of view. From every one of them he saw a patch of light, and the green tint of the outside world. He saw nothing else.

In process of time the diversion of swearing and shooting and swearing again grew monotonous. He went and sat down on the fodder and cursed the negro race silently. He had expected to be well on his way homeward before this, and he had been equally confident that when he turned his face toward Pine Ridge the vexed question of the serving or not serving of a negro magistrate would be settled beyond dispute. The tendency of well-laid plans to miscarry is, to say the least of it, disappointing.

Darkness falls early in a windowless building. It had been dark for many hours when a considerable company of coloured men surrounded the place and held parley with its inmate. They obligingly communicated to him the number of those present, and then in a short, convincing argument demonstrated that any trifling with a gun would be followed by disastrous consequences. They pleasantly reasoned that if his gun were in his hand when the light from their lanterns fell upon him, other guns would speak quickly, and they gave him some wholesome advice relative to the wisdom of leaving it in the fodder.

This advice he deemed it wisest to follow. As a reward for his obedience they treated him with the utmost respect,

escorting him half the way back to the village, and leaving him with the pleasantest of good-night wishes.

"Good-night, sah. Good-night," rang out the parting benediction. "If you'se got ary thing to tell West Stanlin, we-all are his servants. We'll carry your message, sah."

That night's work was as a spark falling on tinder. In a twinkling the whole district was ablaze. White men banded together to avenge the insult put upon one of their number. Black men threatened dire vengeance if any company of white men dared to show their faces in the neighbourhood of West Stanlin's plantation. White and black alike lost control of themselves, and that irresponsible, irrational disturber of public safety, a race war, broke over the community. That which Betsey Stanlin had feared daily for years, and had seen coming nearer and nearer in the course of the struggle over the appointment of a negro magistrate, was to-day a fact. Feelings of neighbourly kindness, born of years of service, were swept away in a moment. Considerations of humanity, of justice, of manliness even, were as bands of straw when it came to holding back the forces of hate that ran riot through the district. For there is this about a race war, that when it is fairly started it sweeps away the restraints of centuries, and hurls communities back in a moment into savagery; it causes men to lose their manhood and women their womanhood, and sets every law—of humanity as well as of country—at defiance. It is at the times when such a war rages that the world looks on in amazement at the sight of a civilized people perpetrating acts of inhumanity that a savage might blush for.

For a time Pandemonium seemed let loose through the tract of country of which West Stanlin's plantation was the centre. Hatred urged men on to commit deeds that would frighten their enemies into submission, and vigilance on the part of the enemy, and some fear of the consequences on the part of each separate band of aggressors,

alone prevented the worst results from following. People looked daily for some terrible happening, and closed their eyes every night with that feeling of insecurity which makes slumber uneasy.

Through it all the heart of Betsey Stanlin was heavy with fear, for her home was the centre to and from which this tide of hatred and passion surged.

"I sure knowed the sorrer was comin', but I ain't knowin' how fur it's goin'," said Betsey sadly. "There's good in most human bein's, and there's a mighty sight o' bad, and when the bad's done got plumb to the top, and got the good under, there ain't no tellin', short of hell itself, what's the lowest place it'll rush men on to. We-uns is sure sweepin' down'ards and not up'ards, and we'se goin' at a powerful gait. The good God is the only one that knows where the end is."

It looked as if there were none. Terror and passion and strife filled up the days. Hoarse voices rose in threats. Women saw their husbands go out from their homes, passion-driven, and wondered whether the little cabin would ever receive them alive again. Black men patrolled the roads. Over in Pine Ridge white men held indignation meetings, and turned out in wagon loads "to teach them darkies where their place was." Then there was waiting and watching in the shelter of the woods, a sudden outrush of black men in numbers overwhelmingly great, and a sharp skirmish. The end was usually an overturned wagon from which horses or mules had been removed, and a band of white men driven ignominiously into the swamp, to return as best they could on foot to the safer region of Pine Ridge. For the time the negroes were determined. Nevertheless there was fear among them.

West Stanlin refused to take active part in the fray. He had not desired that the men of his race should attempt to defend him. He had been prepared to take the consequences of his original opposition to the white men.

He did not feel responsible for the feeling that had been aroused. It was beyond his control. He counselled caution, but he spoke the word with a grim smile. Caution and passion are incompatible as mates, and just now passion reigned.

Of course there was bloodshed. Many shots were fired, and some on both sides were wounded. There was wailing in the cabins, and dire threatening of vengeance in certain homes in the village. It was almost a miracle that none were killed.

So far as the negro planter was concerned, it would not have been easy, at this juncture, to settle the controversy with a bullet. Every approach to the house was guarded. Nevertheless Betsey shook her head.

"There's a heap more safety in keepin' at peace with your neighbours than in standin' guard with clubs and axes and guns," she said. "The best way to stop a bullet is sure to live so's nobody won't want to put it in you. But there, it cert'nly ain't allus possible. West's done acted for the best, and I ain't judgin'. There's a many ways of lookin' at things, and this sure ain't been done for his own pride's sake. He's plumb in earnest, and so's the white men. If there wasn't so much earnestness there wouldn't be so much feelin'. And the whole of it runs to strife. I ain't sayin' it could be helped. I'se too ign'rant to know. But if the Lord would only see fit to send we-uns peace, I'd sure lay down and rest, for I'm plumb tired in the marrer of my bones with this strife and hatin' and injurin'. I wants to love my neighbours and do 'em good. I hates to hate 'em, and to be thinkin' every time I sees 'em that they hates me. But there ain't no peace yet, and it don't look as if there ever would be agin."

Peace certainly seemed further off than ever. There came a time when threats of burning down Pine Ridge were rife.

"And sho' the white men's sayin' dat if so much as a handful o' fire is started ober dar, it'll done be the signal

for we-all to be burnt up in our houses," excitedly explained a young negress. "Lor, it makes the flesh crawl on your bones to hear 'em all. It cert'nly does. I sho' looks at de cradle at night, and me babe layin' in it, and wonders where de lil' one's gwine be in de mornin'. I got a sore heart for de chillens dese days. I tell you dis yere strife 's like livin' in hell. You'se burnin' inside wid hate, and you'se not knowin' dat befo' de mornin' you mayn't be burnin' outside along wid de ole home dat'll maybe be goin' up in sparks ober your head. De Lord help us all, for we-uns is sho' on de highroad to destruction."

It took weeks for the violence to wear itself out, weeks during which Betsey Stanlin never for a moment forgot that the two who made life of any value to her were in momentary danger of death. For at any time a large force of white men might fight their way through, and the home of West Stanlin would of necessity be the point of attack.

Such weeks are long, but they come to an end at last. In time the more violent on either side saw that force availed little. Men grew tired of the ever-present necessity for watchfulness, and the counsels of the more moderate prevailed. Cuthbert Ross and Hardy Kenyon were busy in those days. They argued with their neighbours, black and white in turn. They set before each the question of how much gain was to be looked for from bloodshed and violence. And when passion had raged itself out, and men grew tired of breaking one another's heads, when every one, like Betsey Stanlin, was weary to his very bones of the constant guarding against worse disaster, feeling began to quiet down. The white men turned their energies into a new channel and ceased to fight with guns and clubs.

"There's no getting a shot at that nigger with a gun," said a prominent resident of Pine Ridge, referring to West Stanlin. "But wait a bit. There's more than one way of laying a nigger low. And that nigger 's got to be downed."

## CHAPTER XX.

It is inevitable, when a controversy grows bitter, enough to pass beyond the realm of speech into that of tumultuous action, that the consequences should be laid to the charge of the man who, by some unusual deed or word, first shook the community out of its accustomed quiet. Though he may never have foreseen, much less desired, the end to which the movement led, that first movement was his, and the judgment of the majority of men holds him responsible for the outcome.

West Stanlin had taken little active part in the war that had raged around him, but inasmuch as he was the immediate cause of that war, the blame was laid on his shoulders. From being a respected and comparatively influential man, he became the most unpopular planter in the county. Those planters who had not at the outset opposed his election as magistrate were distinctly repelled by the turn affairs had taken. Even his good friend, Cuthbert Ross, nodded with a shade of reserve when he met his negro neighbour. He could not help thinking what might have been, had the rioting and violence gone but one step further. There were possible horrors that had come near enough of late to be reckoned among the probabilities. And if this man had not become a dangerously prosperous planter, no such contingency would have arisen.

"No doubt West Stanlin felt justified in pushing things thus far, and was honest in his desire to benefit his race," admitted Mr. Ross, ignoring the fact that there had been as much pushing on one side as on the other. "But he has led his people into trouble that will take them the best part of a lifetime to get out of. There's bad feeling enough left in this place to last a generation."

Deep as the ill-feeling had been, however, neither party felt inclined to resume hostilities in the same open form. Everybody had grown tired of personal violence, having realized its danger.

The county gradually settled down, but West Stanlin was not sworn in as magistrate. Legal quibbles were thrown in the way. They gained time for the negro's opponents, and there is everything in gaining time.

Many of the coloured people believed that the fight was over, and that West Stanlin would before long assume the duties of magistrate. Not so Betsey. Her eyes still followed wistfully the two who made up her world.

"We sure ain't sighted the end yet," she said despondently. "Them white folks hasn't never been used to givin' in. They'se had the world and the best that's in it from the beginnin', and there's a heap o' things likelier than that they'll let a nigger put out his hand and get to himself any part of it they has a likin' to. I'm powerful glad the fightin' is done. But sure the strife ain't plumb dead. Its smoulderin' under the surface. The Lord help them I loves when it bursts up agin. It'll hit us somewheres."

West's eyes had a steady determination in them that held out no hope of compromise. Betsey did not counsel it. She knew he would push this thing to the end. And she was not sure that her own heart, torn as it was by fears, was prepared to abandon the cause for which West had already suffered much. Her judgment sided with the negroes in this question. It seemed to her that they were but asking for what was just.

Free was thoroughly in sympathy with his father in the controversy.

"A black man has as much right to a feeling of safety in the matter of justice as a white one," he said. "There isn't one of these planters who would submit, were his life or his interests at stake, to putting them entirely in the

hands of men who were not only of another race, but also of alien feeling. They would not be satisfied to have their differences settled by men whose earlier life and prejudices must of necessity have done something toward biasing their judgment."

West laughed.

"Who'd ask white men to put up with what they expect us to be thankful for, boy?" he demanded.

"We're in the majority," continued his son, "why should it be considered a thing unreasonable that we should ask for magistrates of our own race? There is not one who would dare deny that in point of intelligence and practical fitness for the office, you are ahead of dozens of men who are appointed without a dissenting voice."

"It ain't fitness, or the want of it, my boy, that stands in the way," said West. "It's the remembrance that there was a time when one of 'em owned me as he owned his horse. They'll never forget that. They learned then to think of men as property. It goes hard with 'em to put that property back where it allus belonged—to the level of manhood and womanhood. Free, boy, the curse of slavery ain't dead yet. Bless you, it's eat into the very life of the white men, and eat out some of the stuff that makes a man great. They're littler men down here than they'd 'a been if they hadn't kept men and women in bondage. It'll take 'em a sight o' years to get up to the stature they'd have had if they hadn't never done it. They've sure paid the price in themselves."

"I wonder what will be their next move," said Free. "They're only biding their time."

"You'll see if you wait. There ain't a shadder of a doubt of that," said West grimly.

They had not long to wait. In less than a month after the race war had raged itself out, West Stanlin was in receipt of a letter that he understood to be "the next move." It so happened that about this time his lease of the thou-

sand acres of land he rented expired. The owner was a Southern woman living in New Orleans. Hitherto she had expressed herself as fully satisfied with West's prompt payment of the rent, and liberal treatment of the land. Since he first had dealings with her the lease had twice expired and been twice renewed. This time, however, she communicated to the lessee, through her lawyer, the startling intelligence that with the expiration of the lease her present relations with himself would end. She proposed to resume possession of the land.

"They've done struck, and struck hard," said West, throwing the letter down upon a table.

"And struck like themselves," commented Free when he had read the communication aloud.

"It's the white feelin'," said Betsey sadly. "It's done got to work. We'se sure meetin' sorrer."

Free looked for a minute into his father's eyes.

"It sweeps a good half of the income away at one stroke," he said.

West nodded.

"She's taking back land that's worth double what it was when you took it in hand," continued Free.

"Oh, she's had advisers that understand all about that," said West. "Somebody that knows jest how much I've spent over fertilizin' that land's done posted her in this business. They're a-tryin' squeezin'. Well, I ain't goin' to squeal. I didn't enter into this argument without expectin' to take the consequences. I'm takin' 'em."

He did not take them without making one effort to avert them. He wrote to the owner of the land, offering an increased rent for another term of years. It was refused. West Stanlin knew then that he might reckon himself a comparatively poor man. The rebuilding and refurnishing of his house had taken the greater part of his available funds. He had mortgaged his farm at a high rate of interest to secure his bondsmen when he was

elected magistrate. Now, with more than half of the land he had cultivated taken from him, the yearly sum required to meet the interest looked large.

"We'll make the six hundred acres yield more, Free, boy," he said. "It'll seem a powerful small plantation to work arter the other, but they ain't brought us plumb to the end of our resources yet."

"We ain't plumb at the end of the bad feelin' yet, either," said Betsey, standing in the doorway and looking back into the room. "We'se toiled mighty hard, father, to get as high up the hill as we'se clumb. We'se done been pushed a good part o' the ways back now."

"We'll climb it all over agin," said West stubbornly. "They can push a man down, but they ain't got no power to keep him from risin' up straightway and climbin' afresh."

"I ain't so sure about that," said Betsey. She said it to her own heart, however. Her lips were silent as she turned away.

"There ain't no escapin' pain and sorrer. I'se sure toiled and wearied and toiled agin, hopin' to keep the cup o' bitterness from bein' held to that po' chile's lips. And in the end he's got to drink of it. We'se done begun to go down the hill of fortune. There's poverty and sufferin' at the bottom, and there sure ain't no tellin' how soon we'll be there."

Betsey's toil-hardened fingers locked and unlocked themselves as she spoke. There was nobody to watch the tears as they gathered and fell splashing into the dish-pan. Betsey's heart was aching sore, and there was small comfort ahead. Troubles came fast now, faster, Betsey felt, than the courage to bear them. It takes but a short time to sweep away the savings of a life. Betsey had held tenaciously to that which her hands had gathered together piece by piece, often painfully, always laboriously. The rate at which it was slipping from her grasp bore no fair proportion to that at which it had been

acquired. There seemed no very immediate prospect of poverty, but Betsey looked, not so much at the resources that remained, as at the rate of retrogression. It was swift enough to account for the ache at her heart and the weary looking forward to a future that promised only pain.

"West ain't goin' to give in, and the white folks sure ain't," she said. "It's one comin' dead agin the other, and our po' bits o' things and bits o' lives in between. How long's it goin' to take to grind 'em all to powder?"

The fingers unlocked themselves, and one black, shaking hand went up to wipe away the tears.

"There ain't no good spendin' the time mournin'," she said. "I'se got to keep things goin'. While we lives we'se bound to eat, and we'se livin' yet. Who's that in the yard harassin' them turkeys?"

The instincts of a life overcame the sorrow of the moment, and Betsey went to the door to see who was the disturber of the farmyard harmony. She saw the negro called Preach standing within the gate, carelessly throwing stones in rapid succession at the indignant hens and turkeys.

"What are you doin' there?" asked Betsey sharply. She had no great liking for this particular specimen of her race.

"Lookin' round." The answer was given with a laugh that had a ring of insolence in it. "Where's West?"

"At the mill, likely," said Betsey shortly. "You better go and find him if you want him. Them turkeys won't be no better for bein' run round the yard that away."

"Let 'em stan' still, den, de fools," said the negro. "Dar's a heap o' fools round dis away dat don' know nuff to stan' still. Bless us all, dat West was sho' a bigger fool dan ever I 'lowed he'd be when he done sot up to be as big as a white man. Dis yere's a powerful pretty place to lose."

"It's goin' to be a heap prettier when you take yourself out of it," said Betsey indignantly.

"Me!" replied the negro, with a hoarse laugh. "Lor, bless you, I'se honourin' dis yere place by standin' in it. I sho' is. Dar not anoder darky 'twixt here and Pine Ridge what's got de ear ob de white men same's me. Lor, I could 'a goed anywheres 'mongst 'em in de very thickest ob de fight. I sho' could."

"And into their hen roosts too, eh?" said Betsey, significantly.

Preach laughed again.

"Sho nuff you'se no better dan a babe, Betsey Stanlin," he said. "Dey white gen'lemen don' care a toss ob de head 'bout a chicken nows and dens. Dey don' 'sturb dey heads ober much 'bout a turkey gobbler if he ain't missin' too often. I'se sho' got de lightest fingers in dem gen'lemen's hen roosts ob all de darkies in de neighbourhood. Lor, dey des knows it. Dey laffs and shakes dey heads. I'se in dey good graces. What for? 'Cause I sho' knows my place. Bless you, dar ain't no real harm in a darky likin' chickens, and dar ain't more'n a reasonerble 'mount ob harm in his likin' turkeys. But when a darky forgits hisself to de pint ob likin' de high places ob de earth, when he darst to persume to be anything in de worl' but a low down nigger, den dat nigger a fool. Dere things de nigger may do, and de white folks looks on and laffs, and dere things dat if he 'tempt to do he feel de swift fallin' ob dey-uns' anger. Lor, I'se in grace, I is. I no fool nigger what's aimin' to rise. If I rises to one ob dem hen roosts now and agin, dat's sho' high nuff for me. But West! I done said he was a fool, and he sho' is."

At that the fellow turned on his heel and went chuckling out of the yard. Betsey stood and looked after him.

"What does he mean?" she said. "Has he got wind of any more sorrer?" He done talked as if he knew something."

West came in an hour later with eyes that had a dangerous flash in them.

"Hev you seen Preach?" asked Betsey anxiously.

"Seen him, yes. And kicked him off the plantation." West spoke wrathfully.

"What's he want?" questioned Betsey.

"To see where the shoe pinches, I reckon."

He did not discuss with Betsey the meaning of sundry hints that had fallen from the negro's lips. Like his wife he found it hard to decide how far they were prompted by malice and how far by some secret knowledge. In due time he found out, for there arrived another legal-looking envelope that for a moment made the planter's breath come irregularly. Before he thoroughly understood the force of the communication it contained he had read it through half a dozen times. He knew then that he had upon his hands that fruitful source of ruin—a lawsuit.

"I done thought my home was my own, and nobody couldn't never touch it," he said. "They're a-layin' their clutches on that too."

For the first time since the struggle began, something like real fear assailed West Stanlin. The blow had fallen in such a way that escape seemed impossible. He did not attempt to comfort himself with the assurance that the claim was preposterous. The absurdity of it would not for a moment lessen its danger, and he knew it. The claim had been made, and the case would have to be fought. Yes, and there was not a white lawyer within the State who would plead for a man that had made himself as obnoxious as he—West Stanlin—had done, unless induced by a bribe big enough to cover that obnoxious personality with a golden veil. That subtle influence which had prevailed with a woman living far away in New Orleans, would prevail with every white lawyer to whom he might apply, and coloured lawyers there were none within his reach. He understood as well as if the

event had already transpired, that if he should win at the first hearing of the case, it would be appealed, and would go on until success had become to him almost as great a calamity as failure. He foresaw that if he fought the case it would take a large part of all that he possessed to pay the expenses. On the other hand, if he decided not to fight, the best part of all he possessed would likewise be swept away, for the dispute involved the tract of land on which stood house, and mill, and cotton gin.

It was but a paltry claim, resting upon the absence of a signature in a by-gone deed. But much can be done with a loophole as big as a missing signature when money and influence are pressed into the argument.

The six hundred acres of land owned by West Stanlin had been purchased in three different tracts. That which was in dispute comprised a hundred acres, and was the second purchase made. It adjoined a small holding now in the possession of a negro named French —a cousin of the man Preach. In consideration of long unpaid service on the part of himself and family he had succeeded to his master's estate at that gentleman's death. It was now claimed that the estate was not as small as was supposed, but that, by reason of the missing signature, the hundred acres on which West Stanlin had placed all his buildings should have been added to it. The searchers had gone some distance back to find that flaw in the title. It might or might not invalidate the deed by which West Stanlin held that piece of land, but it would certainly force that too aspiring negro into an expensive fight, and teach other men of dark skin to think well before they stepped out of the place that custom and the will of the ruling race had assigned to them.

The trap was subtly laid, for the war was no longer one of race.

"Finding yourself in difficulties with one of your own

colour, ain't you, West?" asked a white man of the lower class, stopping full across the negro planter's path the day after the new plan of campaign was set on foot.

West Stanlin looked at him with a peculiar smile.

"No, the difficulty ain't with my own colour," he said. "The gain'll maybe come to one of them, and maybe it won't. I ain't judgin'. I can't tell jest what he'll be called on to pay for this, and whether it won't cost him about as much as it would to go and buy him a hundred acres o' land. But the difficulty ain't with him. It's plumb in another direction that the difficult lays."

It was characteristic of West Stanlin that he turned the same determined front to the world in this calamity that he had turned to it in every trouble that he had met in his upward course. He was going down now, and he knew it, but he shewed by no sign of fear or of yielding that defeat and not success was the outcome he looked for.

"We'se sure comin' to the end," said Betsey, with eyes that were hot and dry. "We'se done clumb to the top, and we'se bein' pushed clear down to the bottom. What'll meet us there? I'se fearin' for West and that po' chile."

Free was very active in those days. The dreamy look had left his eyes. They were deep with indignation now. With West he went carefully over the dangers associated with either course that was open to them. They decided that to fight was about as safe as to give in. The young man refused to see the subject in exactly the same light in which it had presented itself to his father at the beginning.

"It does not necessarily follow that it will amount to ruin," he said. "We will not look for it. It may come, if after fighting we lose the case, but we will not hasten our acquaintance with it by meeting it half way."

In spite of his words, however, there was a lingering tenderness of tone, and a half caress in his touch when

he spoke to his mother, or his hand met hers in passing, that told of misgiving rather than of hope. He was thinking of the years of toil that had gathered together these possessions which a few months of controversy were sweeping away.

"She has worked so hard for them," he said. "And now—I wonder where it will end."

It was on one of those days when the end was yet uncertain that Esther appeared at the door of the farmhouse.

"Mrs. Stanlin, may I come in?" she said, "or do you feel indignant enough to visit all the sins of my neighbours on my head? I have heard this tale about a deed. I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life."

"Come in, honey? Sure you may come in," said Betsey slowly. "Miss Esther, chile, we'se feelin' too sad and lonesome to want to turn our friends away from our door. Chile, when sorrer comes in it sure finds a heap o' room, for then's when most everybody that can get away goes out. It ain't jest money we'se lost, honey, it's them we thought was friends, too."

Esther's smile was sympathetic. She had good reason to know how surely these two had lost the friendship of the white people. She was very careful to breathe no hint of the fact, but her own presence there to-day had required more than a little firm determination to accomplish. Franklin Heathcote was among those whose friendly feelings toward the negro planter had undergone a very complete change since the raging of the race war.

"I thought West Stanlin could be depended upon as a law-abiding citizen," he said. "I was mistaken in him."

"Law-abiding to the extent of submitting to being shot without protest for the sake of preserving the peace," said Esther quietly.

Franklin shook his head.

"Betsey has infatuated you," he said. "You see every-

thing on the side of those people. You are too tender-hearted, dear. I had a strong feeling of friendliness toward them myself before this happened, but now—I really don't see how anybody can help holding them responsible for this fuss. We're all the losers by West's conceited obstinacy. It has been a good many dollars out of my pocket, I know. When work is hindered, and property has to be watched day and night, it stands to reason it costs something."

The last words were spoken irritably. It was not like Franklin Heathcote to be irritable where Esther was concerned. But debts have a trying effect upon the temper when creditors are pressing for payment, and Franklin's creditors were becoming importunate. He found his temper less under control than usual in those days.

Not that he loved his wife less, but that he loved her more as the time passed. For her sake he grew nervously anxious when debts that he had expected to clear off easily hung every month a greater weight upon him. He had tried the clearing-off process, and found it slow. It was harder than usual for him to persuade himself that all would yet come right. He found himself looking into Esther's face and wondering how he should bear to see it cloud and change toward him when she learned that he had allowed himself to be drawn beyond his depth, and that to meet present difficulties he had—there, there, what was the use thinking of that? At this point he always broke off, and forcibly turned his thoughts in another direction. It was contrary to the habit of Franklin Heathcote's life to dwell upon the unpleasant, either in retrospect or prospect.

If Esther had been a little less whole-souled for the right, a little easier to persuade when actions needed explaining away, he would not have dreaded so much the look of pain and surprise on her face when she should learn that his gifts to her had landed him deeply in debt.

She had strong views about debts contracted merely for one's own gratification, as she had strong views on many another subject that touched the deeper principles of manhood. Had it not been so, the debts would have troubled him less. And yet he would not have had her different, his earnest, justice-loving wife. Her sensitive horror of every taint of evil was part of the charm of her character.

Nevertheless he was irritable in those days, and it tried him that Esther's sympathies were all on the side of the negroes. When she mentioned her intention of going to comfort Betsey, his annoyance could not be entirely restrained.

"I wish you could find it in your heart to leave them to themselves," he said. "I strongly object to encouraging these people by making a fuss of them. West Stanlin deserves all he has got. He ran this neighbourhood into the closest touch with a form of disaster that you don't quite realize. Once get these darkies into a state of savage riot, and unspeakable horrors will be perpetrated in our midst. It was not West Stanlin's fault that the niggers turned cowards and abstained from doing their worst."

"It was not West Stanlin's fault that they ever began," returned Esther quietly. "The beginning lay not with the coloured men at all. The first shot was fired by a white man."

"The first provocation was given by West Stanlin," said Franklin hotly. "If the fellow had kept quiet there would have been none of this."

"Certainly not," replied Esther. "There never would be any fighting or disagreement if one side would always give in and let the other have its way. Franklin, where is your generosity? Can't you see how much such an argument is wanting in magnanimity? You throw upon the black man the burden of keeping the peace, and make him responsible for war if he fail to stand weakly

aside and let us have all our own way. Don't you see what an insult your argument is to us as a people? If these black men do not give in to us, we cannot restrain ourselves—we have not enough self-control. It is required of them to understand our weakness and not try us too far, lest we rush into crime. Does it make you feel great to pose in such an attitude?"

He turned from her angrily, then came back and laid his hand on her shoulder. He was looking into those flashing, but at the same time tender eyes.

"We shall never see alike," he said. "Your head will always find the best of excuses for your heart, yes, and make everybody else look in the wrong, too. But in this case, dear, I want you to abstain from intercourse with the Stanlins out of respect for my wishes. Call them weaknesses if you like—they are weaknesses that are shared by everybody in the neighbourhood—but have a little respect for them. I don't want to go against everybody's opinion, and I have myself a serious objection to giving any encouragement to that fellow."

Her eyes softened for a moment as they looked into his, but he saw no sign of yielding in them.

"I am sorry," she said gently. "But it would be very unkind to let Betsey think that my friendship toward her had in any way changed. It would be cruel to add that sorrow to the others. Franklin, we cannot see alike in this matter. But can't we agree to differ? I think I must go and see Betsey Stanlin—at least once. What then?"

There was pain in her eyes now, yet they smiled. It hurt her to go contrary to Franklin's wishes, as it hurt her to see him carried away by strong feelings of prejudice against his negro neighbours. Much as she deplored them, however, she respected those prejudices, as she looked for him to respect hers.

"What then?" He stooped and touched her forehead with his lips. "You will have your own way, as you always do, of course. But I wish—"

He broke off and stood looking at her.

"I will try to meet your wishes as far as I can do it without giving Betsey pain," she said. "But I also wish—"

She left the sentence unfinished, and looked at him with a smile. He found it irresistible.

He stood and watched her as she crossed the fields between her own house and Betsey Stanlin's. He found it impossible to be angry with her, let her do what she would.

As West Stanlin had surmised, it was not easy to find a lawyer willing to undertake the case of a man who had rendered himself obnoxious to the white people of the community. Again and again he met with a cold refusal, based sometimes on want of leisure, but given more often without excuse or comment.

"Don't you men of the courts work for money?" asked the negro planter impatiently, when he had met with enough rebuffs to try his patience to the breaking point.

"Certainly, but we are not sufficiently in need of money to undertake every case that is brought to us, and we do not care to have anything to do with this," was the answer.

At last, however, he found a lawyer who was so far in need of money that he proposed to take that of the negro planter, provided he could get enough of it. Like the rest, he at first refused to have anything to do with the case, shrugging his shoulders and advising West to see what he could do with his opponent and not take the case into court. Subsequently, however, he changed his mind—for a consideration.

The consideration was of so substantial a character that West Stanlin found it necessary to see his bondsmen and withdraw from the bank a large part of the sum for which his farm was mortgaged.

"They ain't plumb made me a magistrate yet," he said.

"Maybe that bond won't never be wanted now. If it is, I'll raise a second mortgage on the place. It ain't mortgaged to anything like its value."

The case came on at the next session. It was fought vigorously, so far as West Stanlin's opponents were concerned. They succeeded in making their cause look dangerously plausible. Judgment, however, went for the defendant. Nothing daunted, the advisers of the man French proceeded to try all the loopholes and quibbles of the law to prolong the struggle. Then the expense and the waiting came all over again, and the drain upon the resources of West Stanlin went steadily on. Betsey's face grew very old and worn in those months of suspense.

"We'se livin' yet—livin' in fear and tremblin'," she said, looking round at the treasures that she foresaw might not much longer be hers. "The white people's a-workin' their will. It's a-workin' and a-workin'. There ain't no tellin' what it'll work out afore it stops, but it'll sure be sorrer deeper and deeper. It ain't so much me and West that it matters to. We'se gettin' old. There's the grave for we-uns to rest in. But that chile's got his life to live. And I done thought it was goin' to be a happy one."

The exhaustless pain in Betsey's eyes cut Free to the heart. He threw himself into the work of the plantation with an energy that at times sufficed to dull his own sense of suffering. For the young man was seeing his hopes swept away very fast. He had planned for himself a career that was impossible now. With the best outcome from this lawsuit it would be years before it would be safe for him to relax his efforts and go back to his art studies. He had hungered for them more than ever since he spent one summer in an artist's studio. He understood better how much he had to learn, while at the same time he realized as he had not done before that the artist's touch was of a truth nature's great gift to him.

But the gift needed cultivation, and now, and for years to come, the cultivation of the land would take all the resources at his command. Nobody but Betsey suspected that the young man was giving up the dream of his life when he threw himself with such zest into the farm work that a glow of pride came to West's face.

"We'll pull out of this, sure—you and me together," said the negro planter. "It'll maybe take my lifetime to clear the land of this mortgage, but you'll see it yours yet, Free, boy. They can't down neither you nor me."

But Betsey was not deceived. It takes more than a courageous hiding of pain to deceive a mother, and Betsey was all mother, from the black crinkly hair of her head clear through to the heart that was sore with aching over that "po' chile's disappintment." Betsey knew that these days were turning Free from an ambitious, clever youth into a man. She saw him bracing himself to meet the reverses of fortune, and while she held her peace, she went through every battle with him.

"He's sure grievin' about Magnolia too," she said. "Lor, I know. He'd done set his hopes on her. And he's fearin', and I'se fearin', that this sorrer's goin' to touch that po' chile too, and she'll hev to give up her studies at Fiske. Ah, me! Trouble's sure got long arms. It reaches out and touches them that's dependin' on us, while it holds us so's we can't noways stretch out a finger to help 'em."

She was right. Free was "grievin' " about Magnolia. The love that had taken a firm hold upon him during the week the girl spent with his mother had been strengthened by the numerous letters that had since passed between them. Magnolia found the earlier months of her second year at Fiske happy ones. She was making rapid progress in her studies, and she had many friends. But the well-spring of her gladness lay in the correspondence that never flagged. It was true, that as the time passed it brought sorrow as well as joy,

but Magnolia would not have missed one of those letters, even when they told of the deepest trouble. She was sure her sympathy lightened the sorrow for Free, but she did not know how persistently he put the best face on it to her. She learned nothing of the savage encounters between the white men and the negroes until actual hostilities had come to an end. Then, indeed, her anger was stirred. Her fingers clenched themselves in the old, passionate way, and her breath came fast.

"They killed Gloss because there wasn't room enough for them and a black man to walk through the same county," she said, "and they'd kill Free and his father if they could, because the world isn't big enough to let them and a black man live side by side. If there was an outside wall to this earth, a black man would have to squeeze mighty flat against it to keep from treading on the part they consider theirs. I wonder how heaven's going to hold us all. The earth won't—not without one kicking the other out."

She grew intensely anxious for the letters after that, and her own became more strongly sympathetic. For beneath the young man's brave words she began to catch the strain of hopelessness, the steady looking forward to disaster, that the writer never meant to reveal. It was at this time that she laid her finger gently upon one of the sore spots.

"When this year is over I must try a year's teaching," she wrote. "It will do me more good than anything else. I shall be able to put some of my theoretical knowledge into practice, and oh, how it will gladden Uncle Pete's heart if I can get the school at Hebron. It won't make me rich in anything but experience, but I shall reap a rare harvest of that."

He came very near betraying the love that was in his heart when he answered that letter. He would surely have done so had he not thrown down his pen in fear lest it should say that which must not be uttered. For

the future looked too dark and uncertain to make it a generous act to draw her into any closer connection with himself.

"What have I to offer her?" he asked bitterly. "There is no telling where this strife will end, or whether it will ever end. I cannot bear that she should have to leave Fiske, and yet it may have to come."

"We will not look at the future yet," he wrote. "It may change for us, and then I may dare to tell you of hopes that I must not speak of now. We will not decide for next year at present. You must stay with us on your way back, and we will talk it over."

It would be folly to deny that the thought of that visit on the way home was a light ahead for both these young people. Free told himself that his lips must be silent on the one subject on which they longed to speak, and yet, as the time drew near, that forbidden theme was always in his thoughts.

How did Betsey know the longing that was uppermost in his heart when the time for Magnolia's coming had almost arrived?

"There's sure a comfortin' way of lookin' even at the losin' Fiske for her," she remarked irrelevantly, stopping as she passed to cast a motherly glance upon Free. "You can bring her to me that much the sooner, honey."

He looked at her with startled gaze. Then a conscious smile came to his lips, and his eyes fell.

"I'm not sure she would come," he said. "I have no right to ask her, as things are. I thought I had something to offer her, but now—"

He broke off. His eyes sought his mother's face. It wore for him an encouraging smile.

"Ask her, honey," said Betsey. "There's times when happiness that ain't enough for one will sure hold out for two."

And he did ask her. And thus it happened that Magnolia picked cotton that summer side by side with Uncle

Pete, and knew very little about the heat of the sun or the length of the cotton rows.

"Bless de Lord, de woman happiness has done come to her," said Uncle Pete. "De chile happiness was sho' all crushed out when Gloss was called up to glory, but dis is de Lord's gift in de place of it, and my ole heart is rejoicin' with exceedin' great joy."

And through those same hot summer days Free worked with the hired men, and accomplished as much as any two of them. In spite of the suspense, and the loss that was working itself out, he was happy, for Magnolia was his, and with Magnolia and his own strong arms he felt that he could force the future to yield some good for him yet.

And Betsey smiled, and was glad of the brief respite from pain.

"But the feelin' ain't dead yet," she said. "The white men ain't plumb satisfied we'se been hurt enough for darin' to stan' alongside o' them. I'se sore feart there's on'y pain in the days that's comin'. But them two is sure goin' to bear the pain better together."

## CHAPTER XXI.

"You see it's this way. A fellow can't pay what he hasn't got. Heathcote's good for all he owes, and more, if he's lucky enough to get hold of the money, and doesn't spend it the next minute. But he's gone beyond his depth, and he simply can't meet his payments. You are not the only sufferer. He's putting everybody off."

Ted Renshaw flicked a fly from his horse's leg with his whip as he spoke, and looked gravely into the face of the leading merchant of Pine Ridge.

"I don't like putting him to any trouble," said the shopkeeper dubiously, "but it's going to be a bad thing for me if I can't get that money. It's been running on so long."

"And likely to run on longer, I'm afraid," rejoined Ted Renshaw. I'm sorry for Heathcote. He went at those improvements red hot, and never thought of the future. He'll maybe pull through yet, if he gets time enough."

"That's the rub," said the merchant. "I can't give him time. The wholesale houses are pushing me, and I've got to have the money from somewhere. If I don't get a good stiff payment from Mr. Heathcote before the end of the year, I'm going to be in a tight place."

"Well, I suppose you'll have to try a little squeezing. It may do something. Heathcote may raise money somewhere if he finds he must."

The young planter mounted his horse as he spoke. There was a peculiar smile on his lips as he rode down the village street.

"Rawlins won't stand it much longer," he said. "And if he makes a move it will be the signal for all the rest to follow."

The smile grew a little more pronounced at the thought. The year was only two months from its end and the end of the year is not a pleasant time for a man whose debts considerably exceed his income. Ted Renshaw decided that his friend Heathcote did not look exactly a happy man when they exchanged greetings a mile or two from Pine Ridge.

The two were not on such intimate terms as they had been in the earlier months of Franklin's marriage. Franklin Heathcote had never cordially liked his young neighbour. Yet his greeting to-day was decidedly conciliatory. Ted's, on the contrary, was brusque.

"It's hateful to have to care how a fellow like that feels toward you. But he's not without influence, and if things should go wrong—"

Franklin touched his horse impatiently with his whip and the animal broke into a canter.

Possibly Ted Renshaw's words had some weight with the Pine Ridge merchant. At any rate he brought a little pressure to bear on Franklin Heathcote. If his claim had been the only one, this might not have troubled the planter much. But the young man was so far involved that any decided move on the part of one creditor would be sure to bring the others down upon him. It was necessary to keep the merchant quiet.

Franklin sat long that night in the little den that had been fitted up for an office when he assumed the duties of tax collector. He was trying to see his way through this latest dilemma. A bill to be met and nothing to meet it with was a difficulty real enough to tax the ingenuity of a good financier, and Franklin had never been ingenious in that direction. Esther's step at the door found him no nearer a satisfactory solution than when he left her early in the evening. It was the signal, how-

ever, for the hasty smoothing of the lines of worry from his face.

"I'm coming in a minute," he said, turning with a smile. "I don't wonder you thought it necessary to look me up. I've been an unconscionable time, but I had a little business to attend to that required consideration."

She stood looking in upon him for a minute with gravely inquiring eyes. As the door closed behind her he drew his cheque book toward him quickly, then as quickly pushed it away. A look of painful indecision was on his face. In the end he opened the book and filled in a cheque. But even when he had inclosed it in an envelope he stood looking down upon the letter with the same air of indecision. Once he took it up as if to tear it open.

"What's the use? He won't keep quiet for less than that. And I shall probably succeed in raising it in time," he said.

He drew his hand impatiently across his forehead, as if he would brush away some unwelcome thought, put the letter in his pocket, and went to join Esther.

The next time Ted Renshaw rode into Pine Ridge he took the trouble to go round by the store of the merchant Rawlins.

"Ah, how's business? Money any easier?" he asked familiarly.

"A little," replied the shopkeeper.

"Heard from my friend Heathcote yet?" interrogated Ted.

"Yes. Got a good big cheque from him last week." The tone was triumphant.

"You did? Well, I congratulate you."

The last words came after a noticeable pause. There was perhaps the slightest suspicion of disappointment in them.

"I wonder how he raked that money up," mused the young man. "I'll bet it took more than a trifle to satisfy

Rawlins. I didn't think Franklin could raise another cent if he tried. If he isn't getting into deep waters it's odd to me. Well, time will prove."

Perhaps time did prove. Franklin Heathcote assuredly looked unlike a man who was passing through pleasant waters, as he sat in his office on a night of the last week of the year. Since he dropped into the mail a letter addressed to the merchant Rawlins, he had tried one resource after another. Failure had attended every effort. To-night he would have given much to be able to make the decision of that evening over again. It would be differently made now.

The table was littered with papers and account books. Franklin was making up his returns for the county taxes. There were few delinquents this year. Most of the taxes were in, a circumstance that should have afforded the collector satisfaction. It was not satisfaction, however, that caused him to tap his pen impatiently against the edge of the inkstand and glare at the row of figures on a paper before him. He was engaged in that peculiarly unsatisfactory occupation, the attempt to make two unequal accounts come to the same sum. Presently he rose, and unlocked a small safe.

"If I had only been wise enough to let it come then!" he muttered. "But I wanted to spare her if possible. And I felt so sure I could raise it in time."

There was really no need to count as carefully as he did the rolls of bills he removed from the safe. He knew to a dollar how much each roll contained. He could not make it more, though he counted them all night.

With a quick movement he drew his bank account to him, only to push it away again after a momentary glance at the figures. Then he sat long looking across the table into the wood fire burning itself to ashes on the hearth.

Drops of perspiration had broken out on his forehead.

Once or twice there was a nervous twitching of his lips. The hand that held the pen unconsciously gripped it with a vise-like clutch. What contingency was the young man facing as he sat there with a deepening horror in his eyes? Those eyes saw nothing of the pleasant glow of the fire, though they were fixed intently upon it. The dainty home upon which he had expended so much thought and money brought no sense of well being and cheer to Franklin Heathcote's soul to-night. He was looking at a possibility—nay, he called it a probability, and only by strong exercise of his will prevented his heart from styling it a certainty.

In the cosy little sitting room that opened into her conservatory Esther also sat looking into the fire. She was waiting for her husband, and thinking—or was it wearying?

She was not exacting of disposition. She knew that he must often be away from her, and she had expected to be alone to-night. Franklin had explained that he had many accounts to make up, and she understood that he might be late. But the hours had passed, the servants had gone to their own quarters, and the house had become very still, and he did not come. More than once in those hours there had risen a mist before the young wife's eyes. Her book had fallen into her lap and she had forgotten that it was there.

The face that had been wont to meet the world proudly was sad rather than proud to-night. To none but that friendly fire, leaping and crackling in the solitude of her own room, would Esther have admitted that there was an increasing pain in her heart. She had never hidden from that heart the possibility that the new love might bring new pain. The pain had come, but the love was stronger than the pain, as it was stronger than the pride.

More than once, of late, Esther had sought to draw Franklin into a discussion of financial affairs. On every such occasion he had turned from the subject abruptly.

She perceived that her questions, gently and tactfully though they might be put, troubled him. That he was worried and ill at ease she had long seen. It grieved her that he did not share his troubles with her. Already she suspected that in his eagerness to give her pleasure he had rushed into expenses heavier than he could stand. A hint or two dropped by Marie Renshaw had confirmed her suspicions.

The thought that poverty was lurking in the future was the smallest part of the fear that assailed her. She was prepared for economy. It would have to be rigid indeed, before it would vex her soul as did that other thought that the incurring of those debts betokened a weakness of character on the part of her husband, a less firm hold on the principles of justice and right than she had believed he possessed. She was very whole-souled and earnest, this young Southern woman, and right was to her very much right, and wrong very much wrong. She was jealous as ever for the honour of her husband, jealous lest anything, even his love for her, should diminish the strength of his soul's manhood. Not even to herself would she admit that his standard of right was lower than her own. Nevertheless she constantly found herself measuring his actions by her own standard, and finding excuses for the deficiency. That he had incurred expenses which he had no immediate prospect of meeting, caused her deep pain.

The vagueness of her fears added to their strength. She had hesitated to betray to Franklin any knowledge of his difficulties, hoping that the confidence she desired would yet be given unasked. Hitherto, however, he had, lovingly, but persistently, shut her out of his troubles. Was there anything he feared to tell her, any deviation from the path of absolute rectitude other than that of running recklessly into debt?

She put the suspicion from her. It was a wrong to him—her husband. And yet a haunting sense of evil, a

dread that was surely groundless, but that would not leave her until she had learned from Franklin's own lips that it had its origin in nothing but her fears, made the hours draw out a weary length. She knew that he was especially busy and worried just now, making up his yearly accounts of taxes. For this reason she had forced her own anxiety to stand on one side, and waited for a better opportunity to seek his confidence.

But something in his face to-day had made her doubt the wisdom of her forbearance, had caused her to fear that graver troubles threatened. She had almost decided to wait no longer. It would surely lessen his worry, whatever it might be, to share it with her, even though for the moment he shrank from explanation.

The tiny clock upon the bracket—one of Franklin's gifts—struck the hour. She looked up. It was midnight. He had never been as late before. He must certainly have forgotten how the time was slipping away.

She rose, and passed into the narrow hall that divided her sitting room from Franklin's office. The four doors were quite close—that of her sitting room and a second entrance to the conservatory on the one side, and the garden door and the one opening into Franklin's office on the other. The whole wing had been added by the young man when he brought his wife home. It was more modern in style than was the main part of the house with its big, square hall and old-fashioned rooms.

Her hand was still upon her door when Franklin's opened and he came toward her.

"Franklin, what is it? You are ill."

The pallor of his face alarmed her.

"No. It's nothing but a headache. I've been bothering over those accounts till my head feels as if it would split. There is a discrepancy in one of the lists. I can't make things tally, and it has bothered me. I must have made some stupid mistake. There's nothing worries me like a flaw in my accounts."

He caught the look of tender reproach in her eyes, and turned his own away.

"You are very selfish over those worries," she said. "I wish you would let me share them with you. I have a splendid head for business."

"The fates forbid you should harass it with such business as this," he said.

He put his arm round her and drew her to him. She could feel the beating of his heart.

"Franklin," she said, "it is not a small discrepancy in a tax list that has brought the trouble to your eyes of late. Don't you think you are defrauding me, dear? The biggest half of a wife's privilege is to share her husband's sorrows."

For one moment he strained her to him. Then he released her, stooping to press a kiss upon her forehead.

"You are right," he said, "as you always are. There is something worrying me other than an error in a tax list. It has reference to some money, the want of which will inconvenience me. I can see my way through it, I think, but I shall have to go to Montgomery, and that tomorrow. It will be necessary to take the earliest train, and I do not like leaving you alone."

She looked into his eyes.

"I am much more alone when you shut me out of your confidence, and hide your real self from me, than I shall be when you are in Montgomery," she said. "Franklin, I am getting lonely."

A spasm as of sharp pain crossed his face. She saw it, and her own grew tenderly pitying.

"You must go right to bed, and not think about money any more to-night," she said. "When your head is better you shall take me into partnership in all this business, and see if I cannot be a help. I am not afraid of tangles —nor even of troubles."

The last words were spoken significantly.

For a moment there sprang to his eyes a wild hope. Then he shook his head.

"I would not have you bother your brain till it is bursting—like mine," he said. "I'll go to bed. I don't believe I know what I'm talking about."

His face looked hardly less worn and strained in the early morning light, when he started for Montgomery.

"You are not fit to go," Esther remonstrated. "Can't you put off the journey till to-morrow?"

He shook his head.

"The matter is really urgent," he said. "I was stupid to sit up so late bothering over those accounts. Of course I paid for it with a bad night. I wish I hadn't to go. I feel worried about leaving you alone. I'm afraid it will be impossible to get my business done and catch the last train back. But you won't be frightened. Ulysses Grant will take care of you, and the house too."

The last assurance was given with a short laugh. The valour of Ulysses Grant was a standing joke. Ulysses, the negro factotum of that establishment, was a very great man indeed.

Esther's smile was sober. Her fingers were busy with a refractory button of Franklin's overcoat. When she lifted her eyes he saw that there were tears in them. They were gone in a moment, but that gravely tender face haunted him all the way to the station.

"Ulysses," he said, throwing the reins to the negro, "take care of the house, and of your mistress. You and Matilda will sleep in the kitchen to-night, so that if anybody should disturb Mrs. Heathcote you will be on hand. You are a good shot, and my gun is handy."

A half smile was on the planter's lips as he spoke. Ulysses Grant's marksmanship was credited with being a match for his valour. His loyalty, however, was indisputable.

"Yes, sah. Cert'nly, sah," said Ulysses, with an air of profound importance. "Don't you 'sturb your head

'bout what you leavin' behind you, sah. Ulysses Grant will be on duty, sah, and there ain't no nigger, nor no low down white man, will be like to come within arm shot of Ulysses Grant. There won't nobody give Mrs. Heathcote no trouble while Ulysses Grant's around, sah, nor think to be pickin' and takin' because the master's done gone away. Me and the ole woman will sleep right in the house. You needn't to think, sah, you'se leavin' the misses without a man pertector. Ulysses Grant will be there, sah, and he's a host in himself. Bless you, sah, I'd as soon shoot a man right through the heart as look at him, if he come prowlin' around when you wasn't at home, sah."

Franklin laughed.

"Well, keep a good look out," he said. "That's the whistle. You'd better drive on. The horse won't face the train."

"All right, sah. Very good, sah."

The negro turned his horse hastily, and drove back, looking over his shoulder to watch the train as it entered and left the station, and waving his hand with a grand air as he recognized his master standing upon the platform of the rear car and looking back. He did not see the longing and regret upon the young man's face. Nobody saw it. When Franklin entered the car his countenance had assumed its ordinary conventional calm, though he looked pallid and worn.

Back in the pretty home he had fitted up for his bride, Esther listened for the far away sound of the train, and her heart went with her husband. The day was a long, lonely one for her. She could not forget the look on Franklin's face as it confronted her in the hall on the previous night. What had brought that look there? Did it forbode some new trouble, the nature of which he feared to tell her? His determined silence tended to confirm her worst fears.

She grew so nervously anxious with the endless pro-

cession of questions and forebodings and surmises, that before noon she put her shoulders into a warm fur cape—another of Franklin's somewhat extravagant gifts—and set out on foot for her father's house.

"The walk will do me good," she said. "Whatever the trouble may be, it will not be met the better by nervous brooding over it. When Franklin returns, this uncertainty must end. I don't want to meet the revelation—and him—in a morbid state of mind."

It was a bright December day, a little cold for Alabama. The clear, sharp air made the blood tingle in Esther's veins, and gradually lifted from her heart the heavy weight that had been pressing down upon it. She found it possible to hope again. This trouble, after all, was only a question of money, and a way would be found to meet it. The smile upon her lips when she encountered Free Stanlin was as ready as usual.

"Isn't this a perfect day?" she said. "We can almost claim that we have had genuine Christmas weather down here this year. It has made me half afraid for the safety of my plants at night. The temperature has gone quite low once or twice in the conservatory. You ought to see my night-blooming cereus. There was one that bloomed last evening. The other will, I think, be on exhibition to-night."

She stopped rather lamely. For the moment she had let her tongue run away with her. She had forgotten a standing invitation given to this young man to make himself free of the conservatory. Just now she did not wish him to avail himself of it.

She had a good collection of plants, some of them not quite common. In the young negro's art studies these had a charm for him. He had more than once spent some pleasant hours in that little conservatory, making sketches of flowers not well known to him. Of late he had absented himself entirely. Perhaps he understood something of Franklin Heathcote's feeling toward him-

self and his father. The secret that Esther took much trouble to hide, lest it hurt the pride of her coloured neighbours, was, in view of Franklin's unequivocal attitude, rather an open one.

To-day Esther felt that her mention of the night-blooming cereus was a half invitation to come and see it. She did not want him to take it thus. His presence at the house would annoy Franklin if he knew it, and in her husband's absence Esther would do nothing that savoured of want of loyalty to his wishes. Had Franklin been at home, she might have decided to let the invitation stand, or rather to follow it up by a more direct one to this young artist to come and watch the opening of the flower. But he was not at home, and her heart was with him in his trouble. She would not by the smallest act place herself in opposition to his will. Therefore she stopped speaking with the slightest trace of confusion. Free saw the confusion, and understood. It was he who turned the conversation into a safer channel.

It was a proof of the maturing influence of the deeper trials and joys of life that the smile with which Free went on his way had in it no suspicion of bitterness. The Free Stanlin of a year ago would have resented that quick break in the conversation. To-day he had other and more important matters occupying his thoughts, and they relegated this to its legitimate place. He was rejoicing in a letter from Magnolia, and the contents of that letter made a little more or less of friendliness or unfriendliness on the part of his white neighbours seem a thing of comparatively small moment. Free was not of the temperament that can be unconcerned about the opinion of others. He was sensitive on the point, and always would be, but in view of the more definite sorrows, and especially in view of a definite joy that now engrossed his thoughts, this little pin prick of annoyance was immaterial. It was not of her own will that the young wife forbore to be gracious, and he knew it.

He turned back to the joy that had made the day glad before he met Esther Heathcote. He had had letters from Magnolia before, but none that had quickened his heart beats as this had done. For in it she had consented to let him come for her when early summer drove the children from the school house to the fields. Then Uncle Pete would give up his "lil' gal," and Betsey would gain a daughter.

At present Magnolia was fulfilling the heart's desire of her brother Gloss by imparting to the dark-skinned boys and girls of Hebron some of the knowledge she had acquired at Fiske. She carried to the work an enthusiasm caught from the boy whose greatest ambition in life was "to reach down a helpin' hand" to the imperfectly taught, and in many cases almost absolutely untaught, people of his own race.

"I never realized before how much we lacked down here," she wrote. "Gloss saw further than I did. The two or three months' teaching in the year has been of such a character that the intellect of the children is left absolutely untouched. A few of the sharper ones learn to read—and that is all. The rest go on from year to year, attending school in careless fashion, and advancing not a step. I am trying to wake them up. I almost wish you did not want me for a year or two. But I can do my best now. I shall teach right on till summer, though the trustees say they can pay for only three months for the coloured school. I will teach three months for money, and the rest of the time for love—love of Gloss."

Free also was thinking of Gloss. The boy's earnest, humble face came back to him, a reproof of that sensitiveness that would magnify a want of cordiality into a grievance. Free had enough real sorrows to make his heart sad. But it was not sad to-day. It was too full of Magnolia for sadness.

It was because it was so full of her that he wandered

into his painting room that night when all the rest of the house was abed. The room was a little more like the regulation studio than the one in the old house had been. Free knew better how to fashion it after he had spent those months with an artist in a city. It was the sole alteration made in rebuilding the house. There were only a few canvases there, for the time to paint pictures had been scarce of late. A smile was on the young man's lips as he stood before one that for him had pleasant associations. It was a magnolia tree, its glossy, shapely leaves shining darkly from the canvas, and one exquisite flower just bursting into bloom. He had painted it after the first meeting with the sister of his friend Gloss. Later on she had been pleased to accord it abundant praise.

He turned from it to take up a little sketch of the girl herself. It was a much later piece of work, and, though unfinished, was very suggestive of her young, fresh beauty. Her hand hung by her side. A sudden thought that the effect would be improved by placing a flower in the hand made him stand and gaze at the picture. Then the remembrance of Esther's night-blooming cereus came to him. He shook his head regretfully. He had never seen one.

He was restless to-night. The night was as perfect as the day had been, and the moonlight invited him to wander. He went from his studio into the sharp, clear air. His heart was exultant, in spite of all that tended to cause it discouragement. He could not feel that the future would be all dark, for Magnolia would be his.

His dreams of her were lover-like enough to make him forget time as well as trouble. It was past midnight when on his way home he came in sight of Franklin Heathcote's house. For a moment he stopped by the picket fence which inclosed the garden running round the new wing. The glass of Esther's conservatory gleamed white in the moonlight.

A sudden impulse brought his feet to a stand. Then he saw what he would not, perhaps, otherwise have noticed, a window that had been left open.

"Ulysses has been remiss," he said. "This night air is too near the freezing point for some of Mrs. Heathcote's more delicate plants. That sash ought to be lowered."

Carelessly hanging upon the fence the overcoat that, in spite of the sharp air, he had found too heavy during his brisk walk, he crossed the inclosed space to the conservatory. A half smile was on his lips. He was thinking that his uninvited visit would save Mrs. Heathcote a little disappointment on the morrow. He knew how she loved her flowers.

"It is a wonder I noticed it," he said, as he put up his hand to bring down the sash.

It resisted his efforts. Try as he would, he could not move it from the outside. The moonlight showed him two or three plants with drooping heads.

"This won't do. It is going to be colder before morning," he thought, and followed the thought by climbing in at the window.

Ulysses Grant's lantern was soon found and lighted, and the window examined. It was when he had succeeded in making the sash move easily that Free's eye fell upon the expanded flower of the night-blooming cereus. The plant stood but a few steps away. Because he had never seen one in bloom before it drew and held his attention. Pencil and paper came from his pocket, and his fingers moved rapidly.

Not until he had finished his hurried sketch did it dawn upon him that his position was a slightly equivocal one. So far as the mistress of the establishment was concerned, he was sure of his welcome. But Franklin Heathcote's attitude toward him was another matter.

He put his sketch in his pocket and extinguished the light. As he crawled through the window he fancied he heard a noise somewhere in the house.

"I hope I have not disturbed them," he thought. "I will explain to Mrs. Heathcote the next time I see her. And I must give Ulysses a solemn warning about those plants."

He picked his way among the flower beds, still thinking of Ulysses Grant's delinquencies, and jumped the fence on the opposite side from that at which he had entered. Thus it happened that Free Stanlin reached home without once remembering t e coat hanging upon the palings of Mrs. Heathcote's garden.

If he had stayed ten minutes longer he would have seen lights moving about the house, and heard sounds that would undoubtedly have turned his steps in a different direction. As it was, he went to bed and dreamed of Magnolia.

That night there came to Ulysses Grant, general factotum of the Heathcote establishment, the chance of his life. The kitchen where he and his wife Matilda slept during Mr. Heathcote's absence adjoined the new wing of the house. Esther's bedroom, being in the front of the building, was further off, nevertheless she was the first to become aware of certain unusual noises that seemed to proceed from the back part of the house. Slipping on her dressing gown, she went to investigate. A minute's listening convinced her that the sounds came from Franklin's office, and the remembrance that the safe contained the greater part of the year's taxes made those sounds significant. Proceeding cautiously to a room over the kitchen to ascertain whether Ulysses and Matilda were awake, she had the satisfaction of hearing the voices of husband and wife engaged in altercation. Before she could descend the stairs the kitchen door opened, and Ulysses Grant went into the new wing. After that, it would have puzzled any one to tell exactly what happened, or the order of its happening. Matilda and Ulysses quarrelled to the end of their days over the

question whether the negro first entered the office and then shrieked: "Missis! Matilda! You-all, come! We'se bein' murdered and robbed. Hi! Stop, you thief!" or whether he shrieked first and entered after. One thing was sure. When Esther appeared on the scene he was standing well back toward the door, in such position that had the robber attempted fight instead of flight, Ulysses Grant would have lived to fight another day.

What Esther saw was the back of a man disappearing through the window. He had too nearly completed his escape to allow of her recognizing him. What she heard was a cry from Ulysses: "Lor, it's a nigger! I see his hands and his face when the missis's lamp done flung its light in."

"The safe!" cried Esther.

It had been wrenched open by some violent means, and stood with the door swung half to. Esther went and looked in. The papers appeared to be untouched, but her husband's cash-box, like the safe, had been violently broken into. It was empty.

Across her brain rushed the full significance of the calamity. The money that had been in that safe was public money. Its loss would mean ruin to Franklin. She ran to the window. The thief had disappeared. Her brain worked fast.

"Ulysses, get Mr. Heathcote's gun," she said. "Take it with you and go and wake John and Perrin. You and Perrin search the road and the plantation for the thief. The man has taken a lot of money. If you can catch him before he makes away with it, you shall be well rewarded. Tell John to saddle a horse and go for the sheriff. Don't lose a minute."

"Cert'nly, ma'am," said Ulysses excitedly. "I do jes' that. And if I ketch so much as a sight of a hair of that darky's head, his life won't be worth a snap o' my

finger. No, missis, it sho' won't. This nigger send that thief to kingdom come in less than a bref o' time. He do it, sho'."

The negro disappeared on his errand with more deliberation than his valiant words would have led a stranger to expect. That he did not catch the thief surprised no one except himself. Possibly he did not confine his exertions wholly to hunting for that unknown personage, for a little more than an hour later Cuthbert Ross appeared on the scene.

"My dear, what a dreadful experience for you," he said. "Poor child, you look worried to death. What have you done to catch the thief?"

"Nothing but send for the sheriff, and get the men out," replied Esther. "How did you know about it?"

"Ulysses came for me. Said the master left the missis in his care, and he done guessed she was skeered to death. I think he was "skeered" enough himself to want to get a man upon the place."

He spoke lightly. The look on Esther's face impelled him to do so. The next moment he put his arm round her.

"Don't look at it that way, my child," he said. "Nobody will think Franklin was to blame for this. And we may catch the rascal and recover the money yet."

The sheriff arrived soon after, and a rigorous search of the premises and outbuildings was made. It was then that a coat was found hanging on the garden fence. The sheriff pounced upon it.

"The first bit of evidence," he said.

He and Mr. Ross rode over the plantation looking for traces of the thief, but the man had had too good a start to give them much hope of success. It was Ulysses Grant who brought in the next piece of evidence.

"I reckon I done found out who that sneakin' nigger was," he proclaimed triumphantly. "Ulysses Grant cert'nly got the gift of far seein'. It not take him a heap

o' time to see through a brick wall. Where am that sheriff and Mr. Ross? I done got to tell 'em quick. It's 'mazin' important to put 'em on the right track. They's sho' all out in their reckonin', and they'll never git no nearer to the solvin' o' this mystery till they takes counsel with Ulysses Grant."

"Lor me, shet up!" said Matilda irreverently. "What you heard, anyway? It ain't like to be no account, but you may as well out with it. You'll be like to split if you don't."

"Ole woman, you missin' the mark a mighty sight this time," rejoined Ulysses, chuckling. "What you say if I tole you I got hold o' the end o' the clue o' this great robbery? What you say if I can do what the sheriff sho' can't, and what Mr. Ross don't know no more'n a babe how to set about? What you say if Ulysses Grant stand out the *he*-ro in this yere bisness?"

"Lor, git out!" said Matilda. "You'd make a powerful small sort of a *he*-ro, you would. Somebody's been a foolin' you good. That's 'bout all the *he*-ro there is to it."

But Ulysses stalked off with a broad and noble smile on his countenance to find Mr. Ross and the sheriff.

"Do you know whose coat this is?" asked the sheriff.

Ulysses Grant gazed at the garment solemnly.

"I sho' does, sah," he said.

"Whose?"

"Free Stanlin's, sah. And furthermore, sah, I knows who done bruk into this house last night. I can p'int you to the man and you can take him red-handed, sah, for I see his black fingers as plain as I see yourn now. I did, sho'."

The sheriff laughed.

"Who are you talking about?" he said.

"The thief what done stole Mr. Heathcote's money," replied Ulysses proudly. "I knows him, sah. That

thief was the man that coat appertains to, sah. It Free Stanlin, sah. I'se done proved it."

"Free Stanlin!" It was Cuthbert Ross who uttered the exclamation. "Ulysses Grant, you are a fool."

"No, sah. I isn't, sah. Ulysses Grant no fool, sah. He know what he talkin' 'bout, sah," replied the negro, his words coming fast with indignation. "I knows that Free Stanlin was prowlin' around this house last night, sah. He was seed hangin' round in a 'spicious manner 'bout the time of the robbery, sah," and Ulysses Grant done ferrited it all out, sah. He no fool, sah."

"Who saw him? You didn't," said Mr. Ross.

"No, sah. The nigger Preach, sah. He see him leanin' on the fence of the missis's garden, sah."

"What was Preach doing round here?" asked Mr. Ross suspiciously.

"Nothin', sah. He jes' passin', sah, on his way to another plantation."

"Whose?"

"Mr. Swansea's, sah."

"What was he doing there? Stealing chickens?"

"Yes, sah. I reckon so, sah."

"Did Preach tell you he saw Free Stanlin?"

"Yes, sah."

"Was that all he knew?"

"Yes, sah."

"Very well. You may go now. And, Ulysses! Don't tell this to anybody else. It is necessary to keep these things quiet if they are to be of any use."

"Yes, sah. I understands, sah. Ulysses Grant no fool, sah. He know a thing or two."

Cuthbert Ross and the sheriff conferred together, and as a result of the conference the sheriff proceeded at once to arrest Free Stanlin and the negro Preach on suspicion of having entered the house of Franklin Heathcote and stolen therefrom a sum of money, the amount at present unknown.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"THEY'VE done took him away from me. They've done arrested my chile and locked him up like a common nigger thief."

Betsey Stanlin stood in the farm-yard, staring with dazed eyes into the deep blue of the wintry sky. If that sky had fallen upon her where she stood, it would not have added to her horror. They had laid their hands on her boy, the child she had blessed heaven for, and lived to shield from sorrow. The deepest depths of grief were reached for Betsey when sorrow went home to the heart of her "chile." Her pathetic eyes wandered from the cloudless blue of the sky to the long, deserted road, as she helplessly reiterated her plaint, "They've done took him and locked him up."

From the moment when Free turned to her with the words: "Don't worry, mother. I can set this right in five minutes," and went away with his head held a little higher than usual, she had stood there with the hopeless sorrow in her eyes. West had gone with his son, to offer bail for him if in the hearing before a magistrate the charge should be sustained.

"It is not necessary for you to go," Free said. "I can explain to Mr. Heathcote's satisfaction my presence on his premises last night."

"That's all right," replied West stolidly. "But I'm goin' along. I'm goin' to see fair play, my boy."

Betsey watched them in heart-broken fashion till she could see them no longer, and then turned her eyes, with a mute appeal in them, to the bright, morning sky. She was standing in exactly the same position when West came back alone.

"Where's that po' chile?"

Her cry came out to meet him before he entered the gate.

"In the lock-up. The hearing comes on at two."

Betsey's sorrowful eyes fixed themselves on West's face.

"Father, it'll break his heart."

West grunted.

"Come in," he said a minute later. "The boy's goin' to be back afore night. He ain't goin' to break his heart because some fool makes a mistake. It ain't no disgrace to him or us that we live next door to a fool that don't know an honest man from a thief."

Betsey laid her hand on his arm.

"I called him Free," she said. "He ain't free no more."

"He'll be home afore supper. This might happen to anybody."

West's voice was gruff. Not for the world would he have betrayed the fact that Betsey's words cut like a knife into his heart.

Easy as it had seemed to Free to prove his innocence of a charge so absurd in nature as this, he did not come away triumphant from the preliminary hearing. The magistrate before whom he was taken was a man of strong feeling on the subject of the subordination of the negro race. He had waxed exceedingly hot over West Stanlin's "upstart pretensions." When the son of this obnoxious negro appeared before him on a charge of house-breaking, he was honestly of opinion that the fates were dealing out a little poetic justice. He was inclined to believe that the fellow was guilty. These rampant darkies were never to be trusted. The more airs they put on the more likely they were to be playing some deep game. He listened to the young man's explanation, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you in the habit of breaking into people's con-

servatories to paint flowers at night?" he asked sarcastically.

"I did not break into Mr. Heathcote's conservatory," replied Free quietly. "I went to close a window that was open. I have Mrs. Heathcote's permission to go there at any time. I can call her as a witness if you doubt the fact. She will set your mind at rest speedily."

"There is no necessity for it," said the magistrate haughtily. "You acknowledge that you were in Mr. Heathcote's house at, or near, the time of the robbery. This is, to say the least of it, suspicious. You will have opportunity to prove for what purpose you were there when the case comes on. You are committed for trial."

West came forward and offered bail. The magistrate looked at him with a significant smile while he deliberated. Perhaps the remembrance of the recent drain upon this coloured planter's resources had something to do with the sum he fixed upon. He was not a man of great magnanimity, and he considered this negro the enemy of the white residents of the locality. It took a large part of West's available funds to set his son free to go home with him.

The negro Preach appeared at the same time before the same man. The hearing in his case was short.

"I sho' wasn't at Mr. Heathcote's house when that money was tuk, sah," he said.

"What evidence have you to offer?" interrogated the magistrate.

"I couldn't have been there, sah—your honour—for I'se in one piece and not two," rejoined the negro.

"What has that to do with it?" inquired the magistrate, with the suspicion of a smile.

"Why, sah, a gen'leman like you knows, sah, that if I wasn't in two pieces, and if I was in Mr. Swansea's henroost at de 'zact time when Mr. Heathcote's house was done broke into, I couldn't have been stealin' Mr. Heathcote's money," responded Preach triumphantly.

"What were you doing in Mr. Swansea's hen-roost?" was the next question.

"Lookin' me out a good fat chicken, sah."

"Ah! Unbeknown to Mr. Swansea, I suppose."

"Well, sah, that was what I s'posed, sah. It sho'ly was. But there's times when a nigger's out in his reckonin', sah. He sho' ain't like a white man, your honour. He got his limitations, and reckonin' am one of 'em. He cert'nly think he calc'lated jes' right, and he find he away out. It's a nigger's luck, sah."

"So Mr. Swansea caught you, did he?"

"Yes, sah. Him and me had a kind o' visit together in dat hen-roost, sah, and I sho' convinced Mr. Swansea, sah, dat I was willin' to pay de value of dat chicken, sah, and a *leetle* over. We was a-talkin' 'bout dat matter, sah, an' a-'scussin' de value what a gen'leman might reasonerbly set on a chicken under oncommon circumstances, sah, right on till long past de time when dat house-breakin' o' Mr. Heathcote's done tuk place, sah."

"Ah, and what was the conclusion you came to?" asked the magistrate with a laugh.

"Well, sah, we done concluded dat dat chicken was worth 'bout two weeks' work—under de circumstances, you understand, sah."

"I quite understand," replied the magistrate. "And how are you going to prove this?"

"Well, sah, I done sent and fotched a letter from Mr. Swansea, sah, and he's done told your honour, sah, in dat letter, jes' what I'se said, I reckon. De letter's here to be put in as evidence, sah."

The magistrate read the communication from his friend Mr. Swansea, and laughed.

"You are free," he said. "Mr. Swansea proves conclusively that you were with him at the time the robbery took place. Stop a minute, though. We want you as a witness in the next case. You know Free Stanlin?"

"Yes, sah. Very well, sah," replied Preach with a grin.

"You saw him last night?"

"Yes, sah."

"When?"

"When I was goin' to Mr. Swansea's, sah."

"What was he doing?"

"Leanin' over Mr. Heathcote's garden fence, sah."

"Did you see him enter the place?"

"No, sah."

"Do you know anything more about this case?"

"No, sah."

"You may go. You are discharged."

"Thank you, sah. "I'll sho' go, sah."

And Preach went, with a malicious backward grin at Free Stanlin, whose case had come on immediately after his own.

Free's first act after his liberation was to seek Franklin Heathcote. When he heard that the master of the house was absent, had been absent all night, he hesitated. It was hard to believe that Esther was responsible for his arrest. She heard his voice in the hall and came to meet him with hand outstretched.

"Come in," she said, and let me explain this outrageous mistake. I really hardly know what to say in—"

"It is I who have come to explain," interrupted Free, a little stiffly. "It was without doubt an unusual thing to enter your conservatory by the window, and in the middle of the night, even though my object was the saving of your plants. Once inside, the gratification of a fancy made me forget that I was intruding. I certainly stole a copy of your cereus."

He drew the sketch from his pocket as he spoke.

She did not look at it. She was trying to understand.

"And it was to save my plants," she said regretfully, when he had explained more fully. "I cannot tell you how sorry I am. But it is all over now."

"On the contrary, it is beginning," he said. "The case is to go to trial."

"To go to trial! Mr. Queen can never have been so ignorantly short-sighted," she exclaimed. "Why the charge is the most absurd thing I ever heard."

"*I* thought so until I tried to convince an unconvincible man," replied Free quietly. "I suppose a man is not altogether to blame that he cannot see straight when his feelings are aroused."

Esther looked exceedingly distressed.

"Do you think he remembers the old controversy at such a time as this?" she asked.

Free smiled. "You ought to have been present," he said.

"I wish I had been," she answered fervently. "I did not know that I could be of use. I did not believe that you had been on the premises. I had no knowledge of the arrest until it was too late to prevent it. It was from first to last the act of the sheriff."

Free hesitated for a moment.

"I am afraid that when the trial comes on it will be necessary to ask you to testify that my very foolish intrusion, at an improper time, was in a measure warranted by a former invitation," he said. "I hope you will not object. I am sorry that it is necessary."

"Object!" she said. "What right have I to object? Of course I shall be glad to undo some of the harm that has been done, and to state, and reiterate, that you were welcome at any hour, night or day, to pursue your studies in the conservatory. You must not worry about this," she added sympathetically. "It is shamefully unjust, I know. But it is not you who will be made to look in the wrong in the end. There can be no possible difficulty in clearing you of the charge. We may find the thief yet, and then the case against you will fall through."

Her words suggested to Free Stanlin a phase of the

subject he had not yet had time to realize—the consequences of this loss to the woman before him.

"I am afraid I have been very selfish," he said. "I am troubling you when you already have trouble enough."

She smiled sadly, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Yes, I am in trouble," she said. "This is a great loss. We ought to sympathize with each other, for we are partners in sorrow. There is comfort in sympathy. I want yours. You certainly have mine."

"Thank you," he said, and some of the bitterness had gone out of his tone.

"I wish I had known all this sooner," she said. "It is possible that I could have prevented it, in spite of the sheriff's obstinacy."

Franklin Heathcote returned by the midday train, to be greeted at the station with news of the robbery. For a moment his face flushed painfully. Then it turned ghastly pale.

"Did they take much?" he asked, after that momentary hesitation.

The nervous anxiety in his tone aroused the sympathy of his informer.

"He looked like a man who had got a stunning blow," he said, in talking over Franklin Heathcote's reception of the news with a group of listeners later on. "It's going to be an awkward business for him, this is, and he knows it."

Franklin left the station, and strode on with haste that left him almost breathless when he reached his own door. It was Esther who flung it open, and looked into his white, nervous face. He put out his arm and drew her to him.

"My own dear wife! What a terrible time you have had," he said.

"Franklin, will it ruin you?"

Her voice was low and choked.

"I don't know. I cannot tell yet."

He held her so that she could not look into his face. She felt his hand hot and trembling. For a minute her head rested against his shoulder, and neither spoke.

"If we have to give up our home, dear, and begin right at the bottom, can you bear it?"

His voice broke the silence. It was very low and strained.

"Bear it? Of course I can. Don't hold me so hard," she said. "I want you to look into my face, and see whether you can read fear there."

He bent his head and kissed her.

"You were always too good for me," he said. "It may perhaps be avoided yet. They may give me time to meet this. I will pay back every cent that has been lost by this night's robbery if they will give me a chance. It is only time I want."

"How much was there in the safe?" asked Esther.

"Nearly two thousand dollars."

She drew a quick breath that was almost a gasp. Coming as it had done when Franklin was already in difficulty, could such a loss be made up? A moment later she freed herself and looked into his face.

"We will pay it," she said. "If they will not give us time, we must sell the place. Don't look like that, dear. This is a great misfortune, but misfortune is not dishonesty. At the worst, they can but blame you for not depositing the money in the bank before you went away."

She was looking at him with tenderly sympathetic eyes as she spoke. She saw an expression cross his face that it was beyond her power to read. It was gone before she could study it."

"There'll be blame enough," he said, turning with a short laugh and crossing the hall. "They'll have to say their worst. I don't know that it would do them any good to go further than that. If they wait, I'll meet every cent. If they won't wait, they must take what there is."

"It is doubly hard on you," she said, "coming after your other troubles. Did you succeed in the business you went about?"

"Yes, in a measure," he replied. "I can see my way through that. And this, too," he added, "if they will give me time."

He did not meet her eyes as he spoke. He was looking past her, through the open door of the room.

"I'm afraid there is no hope of catching the thief," she said. "The sheriff was here before daylight, but he has had no success in his search."

He looked at her sharply.

"Have you any clue?" he asked.

"None but the wrong one," she answered, with a sigh, and proceeded to explain how Free Stanlin had become the victim of a disastrous mistake.

Franklin uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"What folly!" he said. "He had nothing to do with it."

"Of course not," said Esther. "I think I feel almost more worried that this has happened than I do over the loss itself. We have brought trouble on innocent people."

Franklin turned from her and walked restlessly up and down the room.

"I never thought of such a thing as that," he said, and added hastily: "Free Stanlin is a fool to be mooning round people's houses at that time of night. Why wasn't he in bed, like every other sensible man? Then this wouldn't have happened."

He shewed more irritability and actual consternation over the arrest of the young negro than he had done over the robbery itself.

"I would not have had it happen for a thousand dollars," he said. "I'm going to see Queen."

"I'm afraid it is too late," replied Esther. "The sheriff was thoroughly convinced that he had found the clue.

Father tried to persuade him that Free Stanlin was incapable of theft, but he was obliged to give in. The sheriff and Mr. Queen are of one mind."

"I'll go and see Queen, anyhow," said Franklin.

He went, and returned anathematizing the "blind stupidity of men who were convinced that they knew everything."

"Queen's as blind as a bat," he growled. "Shuts his eyes and won't see. He hasn't forgotten West's obstinacy. They've none of them forgotten it. Everybody around here is dead against the Stanlins. There's nothing to be done. It will have to go to trial. I wish that fellow had kept out of my conservatory."

There was strong irritation behind the words. Esther perceived that he was worrying much over the unfortunate complication. His anxiety increased her own. She began to realize that this antagonism on the part of the white population might be a source of danger to Free when the trial came on. Her husband's words that everybody was dead against the Stanlins were, she knew, in no sense an overstatement.

It was this last fact that was the burden of Betsey Stanlin's thought by day and by night. Everybody was dead against her and those who were dear to her. The time had come when friendly influence would have meant more than life to her, and almost every man was her enemy.

"The white feelin's so awful strong," she said. "It's done swept away the work of our lives. Now it's takin' them I loves. It's touched my chile. And it ain't satisfied yet. My heart's meltin' with fear. I've done stood up under difficulties and labours, but when the white feelin' comes plumb agin that po' chile I got no more strength in me."

For the first time since the controversy with the white men began, Betsey's ceaseless activity flagged. She had worked and saved and known no rest, hoping that her

labours might preserve some comforts for her husband and her boy when the trouble fell. Now the trouble had come nearer home. It had not spared her other treasures, but it had reached over till it touched the loved ones themselves. In those days Betsey's abounding interest in the house and plantation work failed. She would stand in the kitchen, following Free wistfully with her eyes, and forgetting the business in hand.

"They're goin' to try him for a thief, and I done thought I was rearin' him to stand in a honoured place among his fellers."

She never once uttered the words aloud, but they played like a dirge through her heart.

West Stanlin was obstinately cheerful in the first days of the falling of this final blow.

"You look like you thought them white people was goin' to eat you, mother," he said. "Lor, they ain't omnipotent. They're powerful mad, and powerful determined, but they can't do everything, and they ain't goin' to sustain this charge. You wait. This tide of trouble's goin' to turn."

His cheerfulness lasted until he paid a visit to his lawyer to engage him to defend Free. He chose to go alone. After that interview his confident manner changed.

Not until then did he realize to the full what it meant to be the most unpopular man in the county. He came back muttering: "There's something in the Bible about bein' hated of all men. That's sure the fate of the negro that hasn't got it plumb into his head that he's no call to think he's anything but a low down darky. He's welcome to the work—especially along the lines the white man ain't carin' for—but if he puts in his claim to be a man among the men of his time, every man's hand's agin him till it gets him down, and what'll happen to him then depends on how long it takes to squeeze the last drop o' blood out of him."

The lawyer who had so far defied the opinion of his fellows as to defend the "nigger who was to blame for all the fighting," had done so with no thought of friendliness to the coloured race or of fair play toward a man against whom all the world was up at arms. It was to him solely a question of money. Here was a negro who wanted something done that nobody else would do. Like all his brethren of the law, he was unwilling to have anything to do with so unpopular a black man. But money was a consideration to him. When he put his feelings aside and undertook to try and save West's home from the man who claimed it, it was with the private understanding that he meant to pay himself.

"That nigger's bound to lose all he's got, anyway," he mused. "They'll never let him alone till it's gone. Serve him right. He should have had sense enough to keep quiet. Who does he think *he* is, disturbing the peace of the neighbourhood? But he's got a first-class plantation. It will hold out as long as this lawsuit does, and if it's mine instead of his in the end, it certainly couldn't go to a better man."

Before this last complication he had added to his own bank account the greater part of the sum for which West had mortgaged his farm, and he had not come to the end of the lawsuit yet. He insisted on payment for his services before he rendered them.

"I don't want the case," he said. "I'd rather not have anything to do with it. Please yourself. If you can see a cheaper way to get it done, I shall be glad."

He had made a good thing of this too aggressive negro up to now, but he was not on that account the more ready to be easy in his charges when the second case was offered to him. He listened to West's statement of the difficulty coldly, now and then stopping him to ask a question couched in such terms that it had a more chilling effect than a directly adverse opinion would have

done. When the story was told, he sat looking at the planter fixedly.

"You'd better take the case to somebody else," he said at last.

"What for? Can't you do it?" demanded West.

"I don't want to do it. I already have one case of yours in hand. I don't want another."

"It won't amount to anything, except to appear in court," said West. "It hardly needs a lawyer at all, only if we didn't have one it might prejudice things a little against us."

"Do you think so?" was the answer. "Well, I'm glad —for your sake and the sake of your son. House-breaking is a nasty accusation."

"It won't stand," said West impatiently.

"No?"

"Do you think it will?"

The planter's voice was unconsciously raised.

"H'm! Don't shout. I'm neither judge nor jury."

"But you don't think there's any real danger?"

"Depends on what you call danger. I wouldn't take the chances myself for a thousand dollars."

"What?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, Stanlin," he said. "You're a practical man. What should you say in a case like this? A man gets himself in ill odour. He has had a lawsuit on his hands for months. Those that know him well understand that he is not flush of money; indeed it is a pretty open secret that he is getting hard enough pushed to be looking round him sharply. There is no love lost between him and his neighbours. It may reasonably be supposed that if he could do an ill turn to one of them he wouldn't be sorry. Very well. His nearest neighbour is suddenly called from home when he has a large sum of money in the house. It is surmisable that the other

man knows of this money, and of the unprotected state of his neighbour's house. That night the house is broken into and the money stolen. The only person who can be proved to have been around the place on the night in question is the son of the man who is certainly in need of funds. The young man acknowledges that he entered the house. What then? The money is gone. Who stole it?"

"Free didn't," cried West, springing to his feet.

The lawyer laughed.

"Do you think it will be easy to prove that?" he asked.

For a full minute West Stanlin stood staring at him. Then he sat down again.

"You think he will be convicted?" he said.

"I think it will go hard with him," was the answer.

"What will you charge to defend him?"

The man of the law sat long, biting the end of his pen. He was of a wary nature, not given to haste. He would never be one of the nobler lights of his profession, morally or intellectually. His abilities were of an average character, his self-seeking far above the average. By dint of wise manipulation, and quick seizing upon advantages afforded by other men's needs, he had added dollar to dollar. He saw the prospect of a further augmentation of his wealth to-day, and he became a little more than ordinarily cautious.

"I don't know that I'll do it anyhow," he said at last. "I can't see it would pay. It's going to get me in ill odour. There's no particular reason why I should take it up. You can't expect that a man who has conducted himself toward his neighbours as you have done will have their sympathy. If I followed my own inclination I should leave you to your fate."

"It ain't inclination," said West grimly, "it's money that's goin' to settle this thing between you and me. What do you want for the job?"

They looked into each other's eyes. There was dogged determination in the one pair, and unlimited greed in the other.

"Well, it amounts to this," replied the white man curtly. "If you want me enough to make over what's left of your plantation—it's pretty well mortgaged now, anyhow—I'll engage to fight this case and the other to the end. If you don't want me, I don't want you. So much is certain. I think you'd better leave it as it stands. You're a pretty good talker, and that son of yours has had an education, of a sort. Get up the case between you. It'll maybe answer about as well as if I took up my time attending to it. It's not a promising case, anyway."

West looked at him fixedly.

"You want my plantation—all I've got by my life's work—for defending my boy?" he asked.

There was something in the negro's tone that made the man who sat opposite uncomfortable. He twisted round on his chair, and took up a paper from his desk.

"I don't want anything," he said, "least of all to be bothered with you. I want to get rid of the case. You negroes are a nuisance, anyway."

He leant over his desk and began writing. West Stanlin sat and looked at the man who, perhaps—he was not sure—held his son's destiny in his hand. That portly figure, with its air of well being, irritated him beyond endurance. The half smile on the lawyer's face was indicative of power. This man knew the law. He could use it. He could make it either a useful servant or a fierce foe. He—West Stanlin—knew nothing of its technicalities. If he let the case go into court without counsel, the boy might be convicted. He grew hot at the thought. Imagination pictured his boy sent to the mines, and that for want of a lawyer to plead his cause. What chance would a coloured man stand without counsel by the side of the white men in that court-house, who,

almost to a unit, would be against him? Where would his arguments be in the hands of the court solicitor who would conduct the prosecution? He knew the man—clever, specious, eloquent; at home in the courts, and eager to carry his case. He would go as straight upon a prisoner's track as a bloodhound that had been freed from the leash. He would wind the coils of evidence round him, and then confidently await the result. What hope would there be for any man's boy without a sophisticated frequenter of the courts to plead his cause?

A conviction of his own helplessness seized upon West Stanlin. The man before him was the only one who would, for any sum, however great, give his boy the benefit of professional service. And he asked in return all that was left of a life's hard earnings.

"Well, can I do anything further for you?"

The lawyer slightly turned his head, and threw the words over his shoulder.

"I ain't sure. I'll consult my boy and let you know later."

When West Stanlin shut the door of the lawyer's office and passed out into the street, all his confidence had vanished. He had ridden hopefully into the village. He went out with the hope killed. Upon the boundary of his own plantation he turned a little out of the way to avoid his son. He was not ready yet to let the sting go home to the boy's heart.

"Father, that white lawyer ain't give you no encouragin' talk about our po' chile."

West was two fields' length from the house, and he had not seen Betsey. She had been reading his face as he rode toward home. Now she climbed the fence, and came out upon the road by his side. West slowly and heavily dismounted.

"It's sure the biggest curse that could fall upon a man to be born a nigger in a white man's land."

His voice was low and hoarse. He did not look at

Betsey, but took the horse by the bridle and trudged along the frozen road.

"Don't, father," said Betsey. "The Lord made us niggers, and put us in the land where the white people lives. It sure ain't all theirs. We'se here, and where we'se put we'se got rights. The good God never meant no man's life to be a curse. Won't that white man speak for our po' boy?"

A thrill of intense anxiety ran through the last words.

"Yes, he'll speak for him, providin' we're willin' to give him the plantation for his talkin', and take it as a favour at that."

"The plantation? He wants it all?"

West turned his head toward her.

"He's done give it as his final answer that if he can't hev this plantation made over to him, our boy's got to go to the mines for all he'll lift a finger to stop him."

She put up her hand as if he had aimed a blow at her.

"Don't!" she said. "Don't say it. He couldn't never be sent to the mines, our Free couldn't. Even them white men couldn't go as fur as that. He's never done no wrong. They can't prove anything agin him. They've searched the house, and seen we hadn't got their money."

West was silent. The two were nearing the house.

"Does he say there's any danger?"

Betsey's words were almost a whisper.

"He says he wouldn't be in our boy's place for a thousand dollars."

Betsey's feet suddenly stopped. She stood motionless upon the road. From the morning when Free was arrested her heart had feared and trembled. It had told her that innocence was not always a safeguard against legal conviction of crime, and had whispered with ceaseless reiteration, "It's a white man's court, and the white men are sure not wishin' any good to you and yours."

But now another than her heart had said it, and the fear sprang at once into a real and pressing horror, a something that had become more than a possibility.

"West—stop!"

Her tone was imperative rather than appealing. West's hand on the horse's bridle tightened, and he brought the animal to a stand.

"Is it done fixed he's to speak for our boy?"

"No. There ain't a thing fixed outside his hungry determination to lay his hands on everything," replied West.

"Father, that plantation ain't nothin' to us without him," said Betsey. "We'll sure let it go. We ain't goin' to refuse the po' chile all the chance there is. We cert'nly couldn't take a might o' comfort out of all the plantations in the county if he wasn't there. If they'll on'y give us our boy, they can take all the rest."

They stood facing each other on the frozen road. There was surely a dimness about West's eyes.

"I reckon I'll go back and engage him hard and fast," he said. "We ain't poor while we've got that boy."

He raised his head, and wheeled his horse round. When he passed Roderick Winslow's shop on his way back to Pine Ridge, the shoemaker discovered determination as the predominating expression of his face.

"That negro's got grit," exclaimed the artist of the awl and thread admiringly. "He's climbed inch by inch, and he's going down like a landslide, but you never hear a whimper from him. Talk about a nigger being nothing but an overgrown child! I tell you it takes a man to stand what that feller's stood."

"He's got no more than he deserves," said a customer heartily. "He'd never have been meddled with if he'd kept quiet."

"That's it," retorted Roderick Winslow. "And because he doesn't choose to keep quiet, ruin is the least of the evils we mete out to him. Would you keep quiet

because your neighbours would literally eat you up if you stirred?"

"I should be a fool if I didn't."

"You'd be a coward if you did."

The other laughed.

"Well, he's got enough for meddling," interposed one of the loungers in Roderick Winslow's hospitable workshop. "I shouldn't care to hoe his row just now. How do you stand on the innocence or guilt of that young nigger, Rod?"

"How do I stand? There ain't but one place to stand, is there? It don't take a Solomon to know that a feller like that wouldn't stoop to steal. Bless you, he's all pride—the sort of pride that protects a man from any breach of the law. Free Stanlin would starve any day before he'd take what didn't belong to him."

"What'll you bet that he'll get off?" asked the other.

"Bet! Not an old shoe. What chance has he got?" demanded Roderick. "Where can you get a jury that isn't bristling like a cat with her back up at the mere mention of the name of Stanlin? That court-house will be packed like a sardine box with men that have come to see West Stanlin downed."

"You bet!" said the young man, laughing.

"Do you think that feeling won't go thrilling through the place till it acts like wine on the brains of the jurymen, and gives the solicitor that sort of confidence that carries everything before it?" continued Roderick. "As for the counsel for the prisoner—bah!—he'll take care to get his pay beforehand, and what does he care? And if he did, he'd want to be a mighty clever feller to turn the tide in favour of a Stanlin."

"Don't worry. The black fellers will be there in force, too," said the young man.

"Yes, and they'd better be away," returned Roderick. "Their presence will but accentuate the race feeling. I dare take my oath that Free Stanlin is as innocent as I

am, but I wouldn't stand in his shoes for the chance of being president of the United States. No, sir, and no more would you. Bless us all, we'd any of us rather be dead than have to take a darky's chances, any time."

"His chances are of his own making usually," said the man who was waiting for Roderick to put the finishing touches to a pair of shoes he was renovating. "Why shouldn't the darky half of the crowd at the court-house have as much moral effect as the white half?"

"Because the darky has no influence," was the reply. "Who cares for a darky's opinion? Who troubles himself whether he is pleased or teased? He's nobody. He lives among us, but he's mighty nigh as powerless to influence us as our horses and dogs are. We know he can't help himself. If he gets troublesome we make use of the law to put him in his place again. We teach him to be afraid of the law. It's a useful weapon in our hands."

"Well, let him make himself a power," said the customer. "He can't complain if we reckon him no higher than his actions."

"How is he to make himself a power?" demanded Roderick. "What power should we any of us have if, civilly and politically, we were accounted nonentities? We shut the negro out of everything but the lowest and commonest labour, and then ask why he does not make himself a power in the land. He makes up more than half our population in some parts—round here, for instance—and yet we go on with our schemes and our plans in the villages and hamlets for all the world as if he did not exist, or, existing, had no interest in the outcome. Give him his place, and see if he cannot keep it."

"Oh, you are crazy on the political side of the question," replied the customer. "You talk as if there were nothing in a man's life but politics. A vote isn't everything."

"Isn't it?" said Roderick. "It's all the difference be-

tween power and powerlessness. Can you shew me anything in this country that is not more or less a matter of political influence? Doesn't a man's comfort, and his safety, too, depend on the laws under which he lives? And if he has no voice in the making of those laws, and none of his class have a voice in their making, isn't it ten to one the laws will have something in them that will turn out to be oppressive? The cats and the dogs lived together, and the dogs made the laws for the community. They were good fellers, those dogs, but the cats squalled 'Oppression'! and maybe they were not far wrong. A dog really doesn't thoroughly understand a cat's needs."

A roar of laughter from the listeners drew Roderick Winslow's eyes from his needle. There was a smile on his lips.

"A vote isn't everything," he said, "but do you think our legislators would be as busy as they are, making restrictive laws to govern the negro, if his vote counted for as much as the white man's? Do they busy themselves so assiduously in lessening the privileges of any other class of American born citizens? How do you account for the discriminating legislation that makes it a crime for a black man to do what a white man does, if not by the fact that the negro, having practically no vote, is of no consequence to the legislators? Would our city fathers dare to dole out to the negro the crumbs of the city's good things with as niggardly a hand if the negro had as much to say in the choice of city officials as the white man has? They'd be out of office in a twinkling if they did. The white man of the lowest class pays no more taxes than the coloured man does, but there's not a city privilege that he may not enjoy. His children stand on the same footing with the richer white men's children. Every improving influence of the city is open to him. Why? Because he has power, the power of the ballot, and if he were deprived of his privileges, the good city fathers would soon hear from him. But the negro!

Nobody fears him, for his vote isn't worth much, even if he casts it. This way of managing a community that has dual interests is wonderfully convenient, I admit, but if it did not lead to rank injustice to the non-governing half it would be almost a miracle. There is not a single relation of life that is not affected by such a one-sided arrangement. Where a member of the non-governing class shall live, what parts of this earth he shall walk on, how his children shall be educated, whom he shall marry —or, rather whom he shall *not* marry—what trades or professions he shall be allowed to engage in, and which of the methods of earning a living shall be closed to him, where he shall sit in a public place—provided he is allowed to enter at all—how he shall travel from city to city—all these are matters of law and regulation. And in the making of these laws and regulations that are to bind him he has practically no voice. We are not even satisfied that his voicelessness should be practical and not absolute. We are very busy all over this South in making his interference an absolute impossibility. Would any body of men less law-abiding than the negro race submit to such an arrangement in a land where they do their full share of the work, a land that could never have been what it is to-day if the negro had not helped to make it?"

Another shout of laughter greeted the last words.

"Yes, the nigger *has* had a hand in making this land," sneered the older man of the group. "It is through him that the South has suffered as it has done. We are poor to-day for what the negro has cost us."

"No, sir, you are not," replied the shoemaker warmly. "The South is poor to-day because she did not recognize the moment when human progress had reached a point at which it set its foot down and said: 'Behind lies an institution that has outlived its day. To the men of its time it did not look a wrong, but that time is over. Progress demands that it change with its time, that it

meet the demands of a higher civilization.' Why did Great Britain lose this flourishing colony of America? Because she failed to recognize that same thing. Did she treat her American colonies more shabbily than she and all other nations had been in the habit of treating their colonies from the day colonies were founded? No, sir. But the time had come when human progress set its foot down on such a system of selfish greed on the part of the mother land. If England had recognized that the moment for reform had come, we should have been loyal colonists of the old country to-day. Your South was equally short-sighted. It lost its opportunity, sir, and it had to take the consequences. Its poverty is the price it paid for its blindness."

"H'm! And we are under an obligation to the negro, eh? Indebted to him for making our South what it is?" remarked the older man, returning to the attack. "You are ingenious, Rod, to say the least of it."

"You are indebted to the negro, certainly, sir, in the sense that every country is indebted to the toilers that turned it from a wilderness into a mine of wealth," replied the shoemaker. "This land might have lain undeveloped for centuries if negro labourers had not been imported. How did the matter stand? Our earliest colonists found themselves unable to bear the climate of this South land in the days when the forests were not cut down. The miasma of the swamps and the exhalations from the newly turned ground were death to them. What did they do? Migrated to the healthier spots, and brought in slaves to do the work. They lived in safety in their healthy homes, and the negroes brought the land to submission. By the labour of the coloured race your South is what it is to-day. Do you owe the labourers nothing? Have you a right to treat them as aliens among you?"

"What a fire-eater you are, Rod," laughed the younger man. "The negro is no worse off among us than the

non-voter of other lands is among his people. Manhood suffrage is not enjoyed everywhere."

The little humpbacked man dropped his needle.

"Where all the world is lame, a one-legged man is at no disadvantage," he said. "In the old lands there is no such freedom as we boast of for the masses. It is the many who are without the franchise. I am not saying it is just to them, but they are not in the same case with the negro here. They are no one class set apart to be deprived of manhood's privileges. They are of the same race and the same sympathies with their more fortunate neighbours. Men from among them rise to the franchise every year. They are not debarred as a class from voting; they are simply debarred by circumstances. And a vast number share those circumstances. Moreover, the traditions of the land in which they live are helpful to them. The men who vote have learned by centuries of governing a non-voting class to consider their interests somewhat. They have learned that the working people are a power, though I must say they have been more of a power, and have had more privileges, since more of them had a vote. But in our country every man is a voter except the black man. He's the one-legged man among a swift running people. And he labours under the disadvantage that his interests and the white man's have been, and in a measure are still, antagonistic."

"Look here, Rod," said the older man seriously. "All that you say sounds very well, but we must have a clean ballot. How are we going to get it if we let the darky in? We are not saying he shall never have the privileges we enjoy. What we are saying is that he must be educated first, before it will be safe to trust him with them."

"Educated! Yes," retorted Roderick, "and at the rate we are educating him he will reach a sufficiently high state of development to be allowed to be a man by the time his great-grandchild is an octogenarian. Till

then he has no right to expect safety of life or limb, or any of the privileges that we enjoy by virtue of our civilization in this land of America—irrespective of education. If in the mean time he gets strung up to the limb of a tree, and shot and hung simultaneously—well, it's purely an accident, one of the much to be deplored incidents in his education. Such things will be eliminated as he gets higher up in the scale of civilization. He must have patience. It is the virtue of the ages."

"We all have need of it sometimes," returned the man whose shoe was yet in Roderick Winslow's hand.

The shoemaker laughed, and bent over his work.

"There's your shoe, sir," he said a minute later. "And it's a bit of fair work. If we Americans, as a people, would do fair work with the problem that confronts us in the negro population, it would pay us in as good a foundation for our after walk as a nation as you'll find in them understandings, sir. We're not looking to our own interests when we turn one of the elements of our life and progress into a menace."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"Oyez! Oyez! All who have business with the high Court—" the stentorian voice of the court crier was drowned at this moment by a rapidly passing wagon, and part of his message was lost—"draw near while the honourable Court now holds."

At the words, uttered with far-reaching effect from the top of the court-house steps, there drew near a man and woman whose coming caused a stir in the crowd. There was something in the heavy, determined tramp of that elderly coloured man, that said the spirit had not yet all gone from West Stanlin. By his side walked Betsey, the dignity of sorrow making her short, motherly figure almost impressive as she ascended the steep flight of steps that led to the court-house, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. They were going to put her boy in the prisoner's dock, to call upon him to answer for house-breaking—her boy, than whom there was not a purer among the sons of all the white men of the neighbourhood. A depth of sorrow of which Betsey had never dreamed had been reached. She had looked for trouble when West set himself to oppose the white men. She had expected loss. But this—it was an abyss of horror that her fears had never fathomed. She had sometimes thought of death by a sudden bullet, but this had a power to hurt that death could never have had.

To see her boy put among the law-breakers, if only until his innocence was established, was torture to the proud love of Betsey's heart. And behind that pain was the wild, half-acknowledged fear that more than once had forced for itself recognition, and laid a chilly touch on that heavily beating, aching heart. Suppose the

white men should not acknowledge that her boy was innocent? White men were slow to see excuses for black men, slow to interpret suspicious circumstances in their favour. Suppose they would not believe him when he told them what he was doing in Mr. Heathcote's house? There had not been wanting some among her own people to bring to her discouraging reports. The gossip of a country place is not reassuring in times of trouble. "The white people was sure sayin' Free'd done jailed himself now. They wouldn't give a snap o' their fingers for his chances of gittin' off. They-all was speculatin' how long he'd git." Reports of such nature came almost daily. Even among these people of her own colour Betsey felt the atmosphere of suspicion. It was not in the nature of such things to do other than induce forebodings of evil. Betsey refused to believe that her fears possessed foundation other than the trembling anxiety of her own heart, but they were there.

"That po' chile couldn't never be convicted of what he hadn't done," she said.

But even while she said it a sharp pang of fear shot through her soul. There was only Free's own word to prove that he did not leave the conservatory during the whole time that he was in Franklin Heathcote's house. Suppose they would not believe him?

"They'se sure dreadful hard on black men in them courts," said Betsey. "They makes the law a terrible hard and fast thing, and that po' chile was cert'nly inside Mr. Heathcote's house. He wasn't meanin' a mite o' harm, nor doin' a mite o' harm, and if he was of the same colour as they-uns, they'd likely see it. If any white gentleman was to step in among his neighbour's flowers, meanin' to save 'em from danger, and was to explain jest what he was doin' there, ten chances to one they wouldn't never arrest him, even if a robbery *was* committed that night, 'spechly if he'd got as good a character as my po' chile's. But my boy ain't white, and

when it all rests on the word of a black man, and there ain't no way for him to prove downright conclusive that he's speakin' the truth, won't the white feelin' work? Will they-uns believe my boy? I sure fears and quakes."

Betsey was not in the habit of taking the initiative in public places, especially where white people congregated, and she had no very clear idea where she was going when she entered the door of the court-room. But the sight of her boy sitting by his lawyer in the railed-in space at the front of the court decided her. Her place was by the side of her "chile." "He'd sure be stronger to stand up and answer what they had to say agin him if his mother was beside him." Without a moment's hesitation she walked firmly up the aisle, and took her seat next to her boy. For once West was the follower. The overflowing love that went out like a shield toward "that po' chile who'd got to meet shame through no fault of his own" was strong enough to give to the humble negro woman an absolute fearlessness so far as her own actions were concerned. There were white lawyers sitting inside that rail, but Betsey thought nothing about them to-day. She came and took her seat with a dignity of sorrow that put ordinary distinctions into the plane of absurdity.

When the judge entered she lifted her wistful eyes to his face, and scanned it with pathetic eagerness. It was not a hard face, neither was it a compassionate one. This man had met sorrowful appeal before. He had seen men and women's hearts break before his eyes, and he had been constrained by the duties of his high office to disregard their pain. Betsey felt that he would do his duty as he recognized it; but would he understand that a man whose skin was black was as capable of honour and truthfulness as a white man?

The court was filling fast. There were few important cases coming on, but from far and near white and coloured men had gathered to see the outcome of this ac-

cusation against the son of the negro who had disturbed the long accepted monotony of rule by the white people on the one hand, and unquestioning submission by the coloured people on the other. Before the business of the court began there was not an available seat inside the building, while outside, a restless, noisy crowd waited for the case of paramount interest before pushing their way in.

A new and personal sympathy stirred within Betsey Stanlin when the first cases were called and several other mothers' boys were brought to trial. Even when the guilt of the accused was apparent, tears of compassion rose to her eyes.

"It sure makes us po' women feel that bein' a mother ain't all joy," she thought.

She listened to the sentences with fear and trembling. They seemed so long to her, for she was thinking of Free. She had not been very compassionate hitherto in the case of negroes convicted of theft and other misdemeanours. She had felt an impulse of righteous indignation against "them triflin' niggers that was bringin' discredit on the coloured race." "The nigger people was sore given to goin' astray," she had said. But today even those whose feet had wandered had acquired a new and personal interest to her. For her Free had been dragged from his pedestal of unimpeachable purity, and put among these outcasts—if only for a day. The contact gave these others—reprobates though they might be—a value in Betsey Stanlin's eyes that they had never possessed before.

"They ain't had his chances," she said. "Some of 'em sure ain't never had no chances at all."

The court-house filled fast when the case of Free Stanlin was called. There was an immediate rush for the steps, and a crowd, black and white, occupied every foot of standing room within the building. Those who were not fortunate enough to get in, elbowed one another on

the steps, and the more unlucky stood round the outskirts of the crowd even to the street, waiting to hear the scraps of news passed over other men's shoulders.

Free Stanlin showed no outward signs of perturbation when he stepped into the prisoner's dock. He felt the gaze of all those eyes, and for a moment his own swept round the densely packed room. This crowd of humanity, black and white alike, had been drawn together by the uncertainty which attended his own fate. A little more than he had realized it before, he felt that uncertainty as he stood there. It might be that these men—many of whom had strenuously opposed his father's election as magistrate—would go away triumphant to-day. He had never denied the possibility of such an ending, but he had not admitted it as more than a possibility. In that glance the possible changed for him into the probable.

He did not look round again. Bracing himself for the ordeal, he turned toward the clerk of the court. When the name of the first juryman was drawn, and the man came forward, Free looked into the face of one of his father's most bitter enemies. For a moment his brain was in a whirl. It is not a reassuring thing to trust liberty and reputation in the hands of a foe. He saw the half smile on the man's face, and heard as in a dream the clerk's formula: "You-all look on the prisoner, the prisoner look on you-all. Prisoner, what say you?" Then his brain cleared.

"I object," he said, and with another smile, reflected on half the faces in the room, the man stepped aside.

For a minute Free conferred with his lawyer.

"There is little use objecting," he said. "I have but a limited number of refusals. They are *all* white men, and, as such, the enemies of anybody related to my father."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"We must do the best we can," he said. "It is a pity

you have so many enemies. We must reject only the most pronounced."

When the next name was drawn, and the clerk's formula fell upon his ear, Free hesitated barely a moment. The man was personally a stranger to him. He looked into the face—stony, uncompromising—turned toward the negro prisoner. Then with a quiet smile upon his lips Free uttered the words: "Swear him."

What was the use objecting? No coloured men were called to serve on the jury, and the white men were all more or less his enemies. If he objected to this one, the next might be a more pronounced foe. He made few more objections. Once, when he was confronted by a man who had shouldered a gun and tried to reach West Stanlin's house, he took advantage of his privilege and refused to put his liberty in such hands. But it was not a long process on the whole—this choosing of twelve impartial men to sit in judgment upon the prisoner—for he put little difficulty in the way.

The witnesses were few in number. The negro, Preach, testified to having from a short distance away, on "the big road," seen the prisoner leaning over Mr. Heathcote's fence, but this was of slight importance, since Free himself had in the preliminary hearing owned that he was in Mr. Heathcote's conservatory at twelve o'clock that night.

The court solicitor was an able man, and he had worked up his case industriously. His short, concise statement laid all the facts before the jury. He dwelt on the prompt search made for the robber, and the absence of all result except that which pointed in the direction of the prisoner. The robber was a black man. This fact would be proved by the testimony of the negro, Ulysses Grant. So far as could be ascertained by a rigorous examination on the morning after the robbery, no negro of the neighbourhood had been absent from his home at the time the burglary was committed, except

the prisoner, Free Stanlin. It would be shewn that he had not simply been absent from his home, but had furthermore spent a part of the time of that absence on the premises of Mr. Heathcote. Moreover he had entered those premises, not openly, and in the ordinary way, but by a window that had been left unfastened. He went away hurriedly, so hurriedly that he forgot to carry with him his coat. It was for the jury to decide what the prisoner was doing in the house of Mr. Heathcote during the fifteen minutes that, by his own admission, he passed on the premises, and whether his presence there had anything to do with the loss of the two thousand dollars.

The prisoner lived on the plantation adjoining that of Franklin Heathcote. He was on friendly terms with the family. Presumably he knew enough of the tax collector's affairs to be aware that on that occasion he had a large sum of money in the house. He would also be informed of the absence of Mr. Heathcote, for that gentleman's road to the railway station led past the Stanlin house.

A strong point in the evidence would be the need of money felt by the family of the prisoner at this juncture. The prisoner was a negro, and one of an ambitious character. For the furtherance of ambition the family had lately made itself unpleasantly notorious. It was not necessary to go into particulars. They were well known throughout the county. It was essential, if the ambitions of the family were to be realized, that West Stanlin, the father of the prisoner, should preserve his supremacy among his own race. But misfortune had overtaken him. He was at the present time engaged in an expensive lawsuit. He had been driven to mortgage his plantation. Money was of vastly more importance to him than it had ever been before. Under these circumstances, the knowledge that a large sum lay all but unguarded in a neighbouring house would naturally

prove a great temptation to an ambitious negro like the prisoner. He should prove in the course of the evidence that Franklin Heathcote and his wife had shewn especial kindness to this young negro. What more likely than that a young man of the prisoner's stamp should presume upon such kindness to the extent of supposing that his good white friends thought too much of him ever to suspect him of having anything to do with the loss of the money, should it disappear? With a sum of money within his reach that would clear his family of all pecuniary difficulty, together with comparative safety to himself in securing it, was it unreasonable to suppose that the prisoner had found temptation too strong for him? Upon this supposition the mystery of the disappearance of the money from Mr. Heathcote's house was a mystery no longer. Upon any other it was hard to account for the complete disappearance of the burglar.

There was a look of expectant satisfaction on the white faces in the court-house when the solicitor concluded, and called upon the first witness. A corresponding gloom had settled upon the dark countenances that made up the other half of the onlookers.

"It's done gone agin him a' ready," remarked an ebony mammy in a loudly portentous whisper.

Bit by bit, the solicitor established the assertions he had made. It was easy to prove West Stanlin's need of money, and his son's sympathy with him in his ambitious schemes. When it came to the actual occurrences on the night of the robbery, the interest of the crowd was evinced by renewed pushing and elbowing to secure a little more standing room inside.

"Matilda Grant."

A tall, bony, black woman answered promptly to the name.

"You live with Mr. Heathcote, don't you?" asked the solicitor.

"Lor, no, sah, I don't. Bless you, sah, I don't live with nobody but my ole man—and Mrs. Heathcote, bless her."

"What do you do for Mrs. Heathcote?"

"What does I do, honey? I cooks, in course. How do you reckon Matilda Grant find time to do anything else? Lor, I'se cooked since I was a pickaninny, I has."

"Ulysses Grant is your husband?"

"Yes, sah. He my ole man."

"He is Mr. Heathcote's servant, isn't he?"

"Sho', sah."

"You were sleeping in the kitchen the night of the burglary, I think."

"That's right, sah."

"Why did you do so?"

"Mr. Heathcote ordered it, sah."

"You do not usually sleep there?"

"Lor, no, sah. What we want sleep in dat kitchen oder nights for? We sleep dere dat night to guard de missis an' de money, sho'."

"Ah! Did you hear any disturbance that night?"

"To be sho' I did, sah—heaps o' 'sturbance."

"Tell those gentlemen all about it."

"Yes, sah. Well, gen'lemen, me an' de ole man we put us up a bed in dat kitchen, and we sho' retired to rest. Dat's de truf, gen'lemen. De ole man was a-restin' peaceful. He's a right good sleeper—allus was. I think it 'bout de middle ob de night when I gits 'mazin' 'sturbed. I not plumb awake, but I sho' not hevin' no good rest. An' den I hear a noise—a sort o' scrapin' noise. I think it jes' de ole man snorin', an' I say: 'Shet up, ole man!' An' I lay twixt wakin' an' sleepin', an' I hear dat noise agin. An' I dig my elbow in de ole man's side an' say: 'Shet up, can't ye!' An' it stop awhile an' I gits plumb off. An' den it come big nuff to wake de dead, an' I jes' grab dat ole man by de hair ob his head 'fore I clean awake, an' I say: 'I larn ye to snore

so's you wakes de missis in de bedroom an' de master 'way off at Montgomery.' An' I up and knocks his head agin de bedpost, an' wid dat I wakes nuff to know dat dat noise was gwine on still, an' it sho' wasn't de ole man, for he was grabbin' his head an' layin' speechless."

A laugh ran through the court-house. Matilda turned and looked from the jurors to the crowd.

"I'se tellin' de gospel truf," she said. "He was sho' speechless at de fust. He didn't continue to keep on dat away. De moment come when he found his voice, an' he used it in some 'spressions dat was a leetle unbecomin' to his age and pertensions. Yes, sahs. He turned his tongue 'bout kind o' permisc'ous like for a time, an' me an' him was sho' argifyin' when I heared anoder noise. An' I say: 'For de blessed missis's sake, ole man, shet up an' go an' see what dat noise is!' An' den I jes' 'sist his hastenin' powers by jerkin' of him outer bed an' inter some clothes. 'It's sho' in de master's office,' says I. An' wid dat we runned, both of us, an' when we-uns was in de passage way what leads to de master's room, I jes' stops short an' lets de ole man go ahead. I wasn't wantin' to take all de honour ob findin' dat burglar 'way from him. No, sahs. An' den, sahs, sho' I was too skeered, an' he was too skeered, to know jes' percisely what done happened, and how it come. I heared Ulysses screech an' yell, an' I pushed forrard time nuff to ketch him in my arms as he was backin' outer dat door, an' sorter stop dat back'ard progress. An' den de missis come wid her lamp. We-uns hadn't but a mighty po' light, sahs, but hern, it fell plumb on dat burglar. I couldn't go no furder in, sahs, for I was sho' wrastlin' wid de ole man. It was 'perative dat we-uns should go in dat room an' 'front de thief, an' it was sho' becomin' dat de on'y man ob de lot should go fust. Well, gen'lemen, I was tryin' to tote dat percession in in de right order when de thief he done make a leap for de winder an' clumb out, an' I never seed him no more."

Matilda turned with an air of conscious well-doing from the jurymen to the solicitor.

"I'se done told 'em, sah," she said.

"Did you see the burglar's face?" asked the solicitor.

"No, sah. I didn't, sah."

"Was he a tall man or a short man?"

"Plumb tall, sah."

"As tall as the prisoner?"

"Yes, sah."

"You saw only his back?"

"That's right, sah."

"Judging from that, should you say the burglar was the prisoner in the dock?"

"Well, sah, judgin' by his back, sah, I shouldn't know what to say, sah. It ain't plumb safe to swear to a man's face, sah, and to swear to his back's a heap worser."

"Did the back of the burglar in any way resemble the back of the prisoner?"

"Yes, sah. Resembled it a heap, sah."

"In what way?"

"Well, sah, de back ob de burglar, sah, was straight and slim, more like a white man's dan a darky's, sah."

"Ah! But white men's backs are not all straight and slim. What white man do you know that has a back like that of the burglar?"

"Lor, sah, heaps of 'em has. White men ain't got so much aboundin'ness o' figure as black men, sah. Bless you, sah, de master hisself hev dat same straight, slim back. He sho' hev. De nigger men more aboundin' sah."

"And you think in that respect the burglar was like the prisoner?"

"He was, sho', sah. I ain't sayin' it was his back, sah, I sho' couldn't swear *whose* back it was. If I'd seed his face, I reckon I shouldn't a' been too skeered to know him agin. But I didn't."

Cross-questioning elicited no deviation in Matilda's

story. Ulysses Grant was the next witness. His account agreed with that of Matilda, except in so far as the personal prowess of Ulysses Grant was concerned. That shone brilliant in his narration.

"You did not get inside Mr. Heathcote's office before the burglar escaped, did you?" asked the solicitor.

"Yes, sah, I did, sah," replied Ulysses. "I was sho' rushin' like a worldwind acrost dat office, sah, and de robber's life wasn't wuth de leasest snap of an infant's fingers, sah, when dat burglar done forestalled me by jumpin' out dat winder, sah."

"Did you see his face?"

"Yes, sah."

"What was it like?"

"It was black, sah."

"Do you think it was the prisoner you saw that night?"

"Yes, sah. I does, sah."

"Why do you think so?"

"It was a nigger, sah, sho'! An' it was a tall nigger, sah, an' a lean nigger. It was a nigger dat was genteel in de make-up, sah, not a fleshy nigger. It was a nigger wid a face longer dan it wide. Dere no nigger in dese parts jes' like dat on'y Free Stanlin, sah."

"Will you swear that it was the prisoner?"

"No, sah. Cert'nly not, sah. Ulysses Grant he want to be plumb certain 'fore he swear, sah. But short o' swearin', I sho' wouldn't be afeard to say dat if it warn't Free Stanlin dere ain't anoder man in dese parts what would answer to de prescription ob dat burglar as I seed him dat night."

A little amusement was caused by the prisoner's counsel cross-questioning the witness as to his terror on the night in question.

"Will you swear that you were not too much frightened to know whether the robber was a black man or a white one?" asked the counsel.

"Me, sah? Me afraid?" gasped the redoubtable Ulysses. "Lor, sah, you sho' don' know Ulysses Grant. Why, sah, if dat nigger hadn't 'scaped in less'n a breath, sah, I'd sho' torn him limb from limb, sah. Ulysses Grant not a safe man to trifle wid, sah. Me not able to see, sah? I tells you I see dat burglar wid eyes dat was dat far-seein' dey most burnt a hole where dey sot, sah. No, sah, you'se misunderstandin' de attitude ob Ulysses Grant, sah."

When the brave negro was disposed of, Franklin Heathcote, in short, straightforward words, told the story of his loss.

"I know nothing of the robbery," he said in conclusion, "for I did not return until the next day. But this I know, that if the arrest of Free Stanlin had not taken place before my return, it would never have taken place by my order. I do not believe that the prisoner had anything to do with the burglary. I do not believe him capable of such an act. I have known him as long as I have been in this State, and I would trust any amount of money in his hands."

Esther's words were still more emphatic.

"Free Stanlin's presence in my conservatory that night was an act of kindness to me," she said. "He was in the habit of coming there. On the day in question I had spoken to him of the night-blooming cereus. I know that he spent some time sketching it, for I saw the sketch on the morning after the burglary. I considered his arrest an insult to me as well as to him. He came as my friend, and was welcome at any time to pursue his art studies among my flowers. I do not see any reason to connect his presence in the conservatory with the presence of a burglar in the house."

"There is a door from your conservatory into the house, I believe," said the solicitor. "Is it usually locked?"

"There are two," replied Esther quietly. "As a rule they are locked."

"Were they locked on the night in question?"

"To the best of my knowledge they were."

"Were they found locked or unlocked after the robbery?"

"The one into the passage was unlocked, but whether the key was turned in the confusion of the search, or the door left undone before, I am not able to say."

"You reached the door of Mr. Heathcote's office before the escape of the burglar, I think," said the solicitor.

"I did."

"Did you see the robber?"

"Yes."

"Where was he standing?"

"He was not standing, but running toward the window."

"Did you see him clearly?"

"Not at the first moment. The light that I held was too near my eyes."

"Did you see him clearly at any time?"

"Yes, at the moment when he was jumping from the window."

"Do you think it was the prisoner, Free Stanlin?"

"I do not."

"Why not?"

"His carriage was not that of Free Stanlin, nor did his movements in any way resemble those of the accused. Except in height and general build, I saw no resemblance between the burglar and Free Stanlin."

"The height and build were the same?"

"Approximately."

An expert having explained in what way the safe had been broken open, and declared it a sufficiently easy matter to break into a safe of that description, the case for the prosecution closed.

A sorrowful-eyed woman had followed every word, listening with parted lips and quick-drawn breath. As for the elderly negro by her side, half a dozen times he had all but risen to his feet. They were winding the coils round his boy. He wanted to get up and answer every witness. It was with difficulty he restrained himself. He worked off some of his impatience by jotting down on a piece of paper the points he would have made. Before the counsel for the defence began his speech he took the paper to him.

"They're sure twistin' what's maybe all truth at the start into the biggest lie that was ever told," he said. "Them witnesses ain't liars, maybe, but what they say is bein' put together in such a way that it makes a big lie at the finish. It's your turn now. You've sure got to unwind that testimony a strand at a time, same as that solicitor has twisted it up. I've done made over to you all I've worked for. You're welcome to it if you do this bit of business jest right. I'm lookin' to you to save my boy from that lie they've wove round him. I've put down here some o' the things they said wrong. You'd better read it through."

The lawyer took the paper, glanced over it carelessly, and rolled it up in his hand.

"I told you at the start you had a poor case," he said. "You'd better leave it to me. It won't be any the forwarder for your meddling."

And then the wistful-eyed woman and the nervously impatient man listened to a defence that was not half as able nor half as earnest as the prosecution had been, and the case was closed. The judge began the first words of his charge to the jury. At this point Betsey Stanlin rose.

"Your honour, before the gentlemen over there decides, I want to say something," she said. "I'se a right to say it, for I reckon, sir, I knows whether him you calls the prisoner, and I calls my boy Free, done this thing,

better than anybody else does. Your honour, that boy didn't never take Mr. Heathcote's money. If it could be so, your honour, that them that stands higher than you in the world was to accuse you of doin' some dreadful wicked thing, and was to make it look so sure you done it that it was a wonder the good God didn't sweep you off the earth, and her that had give you birth and rocked you in her arms was to set and hear it all till her heart was first a-burnin' with indignation and then a-meltin' with fear, wouldn't she be able to tell better'n them strangers whether you could 'a done the evil thing or not? If she'd knowed every workin' of your soul since you was a little innercent babe, and knowed that that evil thing they was accusin' you of couldn't never grow there, and that what they was sayin' was as impossible as for the sun to give out darkness instead of light, wouldn't she be a better witness, your honour, than them that never knowed you at all, but on'y judged by the sort o' things that can be twisted to look this away or that away accordin' to who twists 'em? Your honour, I *knows* that po' chile never committed no robbery, because he ain't got it in him to steal. That gentleman, the solicitor, said the knowledge that there was money in Mr. Heathcote's house would sure be a sore temptation to him. Your honour, he don't know my boy, or he wouldn't have said that. He was speakin' of one he don't know. He can't know him. He ain't his colour. But he's my boy Free, and I'se his mother, and I *know* him. He's done been a good boy since he was a baby. His fingers would sure never take what wasn't his. They couldn't. Maybe what I'm sayin' ain't jest what you call evidence," she continued, as the judge opened his lips to speak, "but, your honour, it's truth. If them gentlemen decides my po' chile done took Mr. Heathcote's money, they'll sure decide a lie."

She sat down, and the judge charged the jury. His words were very fair and calm and dispassionate, but

perhaps the words of that last witness, who had *not* given evidence, had something to do with his warning to them to weigh well the evidence, and if it seemed to them doubtful whether the prisoner had done anything further than enter Mr. Heathcote's conservatory under unusual and suspicious circumstances, to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Perhaps they would have done so in the event he had supposed. But in the minds of these twelve men there was no such doubt. Every one of the number had made up his mind that the prisoner was guilty before ever he came into the court-house. Every one of the twelve would have been sorry to believe that the prisoner was *not* guilty. They were unanimous in their satisfaction that a family that had proved a menace to the ancient traditions of the neighbourhood should be caught in the toils of the law at last. They had listened to the evidence with an eager desire to have their preconceived opinions confirmed. They were quite satisfied. Those opinions had been amply confirmed.

There was little need for discussion or delay. Yet—for the sake of appearances, perhaps—they stayed out for about fifteen minutes.

And for those fifteen minutes West Stanlin turned a determinedly encouraging face toward his boy, and assured him it would soon be all over, and Betsey, having made her appeal to a high earthly power, took that heart, fluttering and fainting with fear, to a higher tribunal, and put in her plea at a court where the colour line is never drawn.

The fifteen minutes passed. The jury returned, and the foreman rose.

"Have you come to an agreement?" asked the judge.

"We have, your honour. We find the prisoner guilty."

Betsey turned her eyes from the foreman to the judge. Then she rose and stood by her boy, putting out her

hand and taking his. And with it held firm in her loving clasp she and her boy Free listened to the sentence.

In consideration of the former good character of the prisoner, and of the respectability of his family, it would be made lighter than usual, the judge was saying. Lighter! Betsey's hand tightened its hold on Free's. Four years in the mines did not seem a light sentence.

A minute more, and it was all over, and the prisoner was being removed. The prisoner! Not for a day now, but for four years.

He preserved his proud attitude till the last. Betsey and West rose as they led him out, walking with him as long as they could. Then they turned and went back to the home they had made for their boy. Neither spoke till the drive was over and the door reached. Then Betsey stood and looked out into the sunlight that was to be shut away from her boy.

"The judge was white and the jury was white and the feelin' was white, and there was nothin' black but my po' chile," she said.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

A PLATFORM crowded with men in convict garb, and wearing the miner's cap with its lamp and bright reflector, dropped down into a hole in the earth with a swiftness of motion that literally took the breath away from all who were not inured to the sensation. It required more than a day or two of initiation to get accustomed to that plunge into black space. Viewed from the top, it looked like a wild rush to destruction. To the majority of the men who stood upon that platform the sensation had lost its novelty. They had gasped over it once, as a certain tall, well-built young man of their number was doing to-day. He braced himself for the downward rush with a determination not to be overcome by it, but he stood sick and faint in his place when it came to an end and the others scrambled off.

Free Stanlin had been for more than a week at the mine, but that drop into the depths had not yet lost its power to disconcert heart and brain and leave him gasping. He was no coward, this young negro who suddenly found himself in circumstances calculated to try the courage and the soul of a man, and he drew himself together quickly and followed the crowd. The first time he went down with that dropping platform, the elevator all but started on its upward rush before he had sufficiently recovered his senses to step off. In time he would get used to it, and walk away as unconcernedly as the rest. In time, perhaps, the prison life would cease to be to him one long drop into the depths of darkness.

He had not recovered from the horror that seized upon him when a jury of white men pronounced him guilty of stealing two thousand dollars from the safe of Frank-

lin Heathcote. The darkness that closed about him then found fit completion in the damp, low-roofed alleys of the mine where he lay prone, hewing out a prescribed quantity of coal. The earth had cast him from her bosom into her abysses. Life had cast him out. A hot sense of shame and indignation possessed him. Every theory of his life was at fault. He had believed that honour was twin sister to virtue, and disgrace near of kin to evil doing. Now shame had seized hold on virtue, and a man who had not sinned was thrust among the evil doers.

He had been a proud man, with the pride of conscious integrity. His pride had been swept from under him. In the eyes of the world he—Free Stanlin—was a thief. When he climbed aboard the train that was to take him and other prisoners to the mines, and saw a smile of satisfaction on more than one countenance among the idlers at the station, his cheeks tingled. Every nerve in his body seemed to be tingling in sympathy. He drew a deep breath of relief when he perceived that neither West Stanlin nor Betsey was there. He could not bear to let them share his disgrace. He had expected to see them. West had declared his intention of going with his boy to the gates of the prison. Doubtless he had been unable to ascertain on what day the removal of the prisoners was to take place.

That journey to Birmingham was a horror that had left its impress upon him. Free had never been very egotistical for a *young* man, but he was to be excused for feeling on this occasion that all eyes were following him as he sat, or walked—chained—among convicted law-breakers. It was over now, and he was one among five hundred prisoners. No need to hang down his head. Every man here was an outcast. When he passed within the high fence which surrounded the prison, he got beyond the bounds of respectability.

He had passed before then beyond the bounds of hope.

From the day when twelve of his neighbours pronounced that verdict of "Guilty," he had lived in a dream of despair. Tender, loving pity for the pain and defeat that were the outcome of the brave, unceasing labours of West Stanlin and Betsey, his wife, a longing desire to comfort his mother and speak cheery words to his father, were the sole thoughts other than dark ones that ran through it. For his own pain did not make him forgetful that their loss and sorrow were as deep as his, and the future almost as dark for them as for him.

For himself there was no light at all. He looked neither backward nor forward, but lived in the unbroken blackness of the present. There was no rebound of soul against this dense, hopeless darkness that had overtaken him, no effort to throw it off and find some light somewhere. The blow was too recent and too complete. There was no alleviation in the thought that in four years he would be free. To a proud nature like his, such shame as this could never lift. The memory of these years in the mine would cling to him as long as he lived.

He had braced himself to meet financial ruin. The sturdier part of his nature had asserted itself against giving in to defeat, and he was ready, like West, to earn prosperity all over again. But this was different. There might be something heroic in losing all a man had in the cause of his people, but it required a higher form of heroism to carry this stigma all his life.

With this last stroke, the ruin of his life, as he had planned it and lived it, was complete. It was the closing once for all of every avenue of good, and the opening up of a highroad along which evil in its most aggravated form was free to rush in upon him. He made no fight against despair. He fought with nothing, not even pain.

Nevertheless there was one form of pain that as yet he could not bear. Tender thoughts of Magnolia, the

memory of the fair, girlish face, with its indignant sympathy written upon it, stirred his heart too strongly. It had nerved him to action all summer—that face that he would see no more except in his dreams. Now he dared not think of it. For Magnolia, like all other good, had gone out of his life. He found but one basis for congratulation, and that lay in the fact that it was possible to put her outside of this evil. He had not yet linked her fate with his. The life he had helped to open for her was untouched—except by sorrow.

On the sorrow he must not dwell. It was better for her than shame. And in time it would heal, and her life would go on again in happier channels—without him. The bare thought stung him. Yet he was glad. It might have been otherwise. This monstrous blow that had come without warning might have fallen later, and taken her life as well as his own.

The memory of Magnolia was too tender for him to bear. For the time he put her out of his thoughts—never out of his heart. He bore all the other pain with a hard despair. This he put from him. And yet it was always there, always giving to the other losses their force. Life had been doubled in value since Magnolia came into it.

He went down into the mine this morning with a sense of being driven by fate. Those close, dark passages, where a man could not stand upright, where his very limbs were cramped and prisoned, were a visible representation of that which had overtaken his soul. It was in the dark, cramped, prisoned. It found no means of release.

He took his tools and flung himself upon the wet rock. A savage rage against fate, against a world that could crush out the aspirations of men and women and make life a curse, possessed him. He hated the world. He hated those who, in power and prosperity them-

selves, had hurled him down to this. A fierce desire to retaliate, to make these men suffer as he was suffering, took hold upon him. He wielded his pick with a fury that sent the lumps of coal wildly about him. He was rash in his working to-day. He would not have cared if a mass of that shining coal had fallen upon him. What would it matter? When the hope was crushed out of a man, it was but a small thing to crush the life out, too.

The coal fell on all sides. At this rate his daily task would be early accomplished—if he did not end it and himself before that time. He had no desire to finish it, except that he knew it must be done before the signal was given to leave the mine. When it was completed, his time would be his own. This, also, was without significance to him. There were men in the other passages who were hurrying to get through their tasks and fill a truck on their own account. It would give them money to spend, and money meant privileges and luxuries. Free Stanlin had no desire for luxuries. He had reached the point where he had no desire for anything, other than to be left alone. And he was very much alone at the end of this short, low passage. It seemed to him he was alone in a universe of blackness. He sought no fellowship, looked onward to no change, but lived in the rayless present and tasted deeply of despair.

In those days he was learning the nature of hate. He had chafed against the white man's arrogant determination to rule, and resented his assumption of superiority. He had sometimes despised him for his want of magnanimity. Now he hated him. And since there is no comfort in hatred, his rage and pain burned the hotter, and its only outlet was found in those savage blows against the wall of his temporary prison back there at the passage end.

Suddenly, into this all-pervading feeling of despair and hate, there came a new sensation, a momentary curi-

osity. The lumps of coal over which he had crawled as he penetrated further into the rock, and which were now behind him, had become possessed of motion other than that which gravity gave to them when his pick loosened them from their close connection with the rock mass. He could not see behind him without turning himself laboriously round, but he was conscious that those pieces which were furthest back were making a rapid movement down the passage. His pick loosened another flake. With a backward thrust of his hand he sent part of it with considerable force in the direction of those retreating lumps. A low cry of pain and dismay told him he had not aimed badly. He twisted himself round in the cramped space, and, with head and shoulders bent, made a dive along the low passage. The next moment his hand was on a man's shoulder, and he had twirled the owner of the shoulder round till they stood, two doubled-up figures, confronting each other.

"What are you after, you thief, stealing my coal?"

"I ain't stealin'. I'm borrowin'. I'll sho' put it all back. Don't make a row about it and git me in trouble. I'll help fill your truck."

A negro, with eyes that seemed to be starting from his head with terror, stood shaking under the firm clutch of Free's hand. Those terrified eyes had a strange effect on the captor. Their weakness struck to his soul. He had seen men of his race who had little manly strength, and had despised them. He had never realised their weakness as he did when the light of his lamp fell upon that negro's eyes.

"What did you steal that coal for?"

His voice was stern.

"To git my truck full. Them that manages this cursed place thinks I'm plumb made of iron. They set me more coal to dig than two other men. And I wanted to git out a truck of my own. I'm powerful in need of the money."

"A mighty good excuse for stealing," said Free, sarcastically.

The boy, for he was nothing more, looked at his captor. Then, prompted by desperation, he lifted his head and faced him squarely.

"Look here," he said piteously, "I swear I'll make this up to you if you don't kick up a row. What good's it goin' to do you to git me in trouble? I'm druv clean out o' my wits. It's git some money as good as in hand afore night, or be kicked into jelly by that Pete Sanderson. He vowed he wouldn't wait another day for no nigger in this prison. He'd take it out o' me one way or 'nother. You ain't been here long, and you don't know. Pete's powerful dangerous when he's mad."

"What do you owe Pete money for?"

The real terror in the boy's eyes drew the question from Free.

"We-uns had a game or two, and Pete won."

"Gambling! And you want to take my coal to pay for that sort of thing!"

Free's tone was contemptuous. The boy looked at him again.

"You-uns ain't our sort here," he said. "But you ain't been stifled up in this hole for long yit. I sho' don't know what you-uns is made of. You ain't scared o' work, but you don't seem to want nothin'—eatin', nor pleasure, nor nothin'. I ain't so. I can't be. I ache all over for somethin' good—somethin' to eat or drink or do. I can't live a dyin' life like you-uns is a-doin'. There's some part o' me got to try for somethin' out o' livin' if I *is* in a prison. I'd die if it didn't. And them games is a sort o' life. You feel all stirred up by 'em. You ain't dead all through, like you are most times. But it's a mighty big scratch to pay for it when you lose, and the 'thorities sho' be drefful hard on me. They gives me the biggest task o' coal to git out that's give in this place, bekase they says I'm strong. It cert'nly ain't

no easy thing to git a extry truck out for myself. But I'll work like a steam engine and git some out for you if you'll keep this dark."

By what law of affinity was it that there came before Free Stanlin's vision at that moment another pair of eyes, earnest, humble, the eyes of one who, like this negro before him, was only a boy?

"I sure want to lift myself up so's I can reach down a helpin' hand."

With the gleam of a lightning flash the thought shot through the hatred and despair in the soul of Free Stanlin. "A helpin' hand." One needed to be a prisoner in that great wooden building hard by the mine to know just how much a helping hand was wanted here in this social quagmire. Souls that hated—as his did; souls that seethed with rampant, irrepressible wickedness; souls like that of the boy before him that were weak and craving, that ached for a new sensation, and were ready for anything, good or bad, if it did but break the monotony of days that were nothing but bare terms of existence; souls that lacked the stamina that makes a man—the land had swept them together here in a heap—and left them.

Something of the vision that had come to Gloss Boyd as he stood by the negro church at the edge of the forest came to Free Stanlin then. He saw the helpless without a helper, and again the words rang through his brain: "Reach down a helpin' hand."

"Where's your truck?"

The contempt had gone from the speaker's voice.

"Jest round the bend."

"I'll help you to push it up. You can take all that's there."

"All you've got out this mornin'?"

"Yes. Hurry up. Fill your truck and get an empty one back. There's more than a load between what you've got out and this."

"I'll pay you back," said the boy eagerly.

"That's all right," replied Free.

He helped load on the coal. When the truck was full he put the rest in his own empty one and pushed it back to the place where the boy was working.

"There, put that in yours when it comes down, and push that truck up near me," he said. He turned and walked back into the passage, then stopped and retraced his steps.

"What's your name?"

The boy stopped in his work, and looked up.

"Cleve Boynton. But you needn't to ask. I ain't aimin' to play you false. I'll git out as much for you."

"No, you won't. I don't care a snap for a truck of coal. Go to work and get it out for yourself."

When Free Stanlin threw himself again upon the damp rock, and began hewing at the roof ahead of him, the dead hatred was no longer in the forefront of his consciousness. A faint breath of warmth had come across the cold blankness of his despair. His antagonism to the whole world had been disturbed by an erratic impulse of sympathy and help. He found himself thinking of Gloss, the boy whose dreams of life had been dreams of helping. The thought was pertinacious. Half unconsciously he began working the boy's ideal into this place.

There could hardly have been found anything more loathsome to one of Free Stanlin's temperament than the place in which he found himself. This was no model prison. In truth, it was not a prison at all, except in the matter of confinement. Those great buildings were simply rough barracks, where the convicts could eat and sleep when they came up from the mines. The men who were in authority looked upon each convict as a working machine. A certain rate was paid for his labour. If he kept well and strong, a certain amount of work could be got out of him. This was not a disciplinary institution.

It was simply a working one. Things were entirely on a financial basis. If the men performed their allotted tasks—set each month according to the strength and experience of the convict—they might do what they would after work hours. Nobody interfered with them. They were shut in the great wards and left to one another's influence. Everything a man could pay for found its way in there. There was feasting and mirth and rollicking. The stronger ruled the weak. There were tyrants whose anger was feared. It was not a school of virtue. Boys went in there novices in crime, and came out initiated.

To Free the black darkness of the mine, loathsome, and damp, and soul-depressing, was better than the half-lighted room where he threw himself in his bunk and waited for the lights to be put out and quiet to succeed the clamour. He had found nothing in common between himself and these prisoners—the majority of them men of his own race. As the young negro had said, he was not of their stamp. But to-day Gloss Boyd's ideal was clashing with this aloofness of attitude. These convicts were of his own people, the race Gloss had desired to help. Their lives were empty of everything ennobling. A helping hand would mean infinitely more to them than to those more fortunate whom Gloss had had in mind.

Mechanically Free filled his truck, and sent it up, and filled it again. He did not spare his strength. He had never spared it since he was brought here. Perhaps he was reckless of it. It was not superabundant. He finished his task before the summons for leaving off work, notwithstanding that he had given a part of his coal to the boy Cleve. When he stepped upon the platform of the elevator, and came up with a rush to the surface of the earth, he turned for the first time with something like interest to look at his fellow workers.

He continued the scrutiny when he was seated at one

of the bare, wooden tables of the long, shed-like room that served for a refectory. With his deep tin plate filled before him, and his tin mug full of coffee by his side, he forgot his supper and looked down the room at the gang of workers, most of them appeasing their hunger ravenously. Something of the feeling that had stirred in his heart when he looked into the eyes of Cleve Boynton awoke again now. No, he was "not like they-uns." Could they be led? he asked himself. Was there a possibility of a step up, even here in these barracks?

There were some among the convicts who were not present at that meal. Pork and beans was fare too meagre for such. Pete Sanderson had planned to regale himself on roast fowl to-night. The bird, dressed and roasted by the cook as a speculation of his own, was a savory morsel by the side of this prison supper. Pete was never without money. Many a truck of coal was got out—not by the labour of Pete's arms—to keep Pete's pockets replenished. But Pete was skilful at games of chance, and—a fellow must have amusement.

A man may lose all interest in his own life, but from the moment when he begins to take an interest in the life of another, the grip of despair is broken. When Free Stanlin was shut in with the other inmates of the ward that evening, he looked round for Cleve Boynton. The boy was there, over in a corner with Pete Sanderson. Free strolled that way.

"Got anything on hand to-night?" he asked.

Pete looked at the speaker sharply. He was a great, hulking fellow, black as the coal he dug. Every line of his face showed the bully.

"Dunno. Want to play a game?"

"Not I. It's not in my line. Don't you do anything but play such games as these here?"

Free leaned against the edge of a berth, and began to talk—of this thing and that. He was studying the negro before him—the evil genius of the ward. He understood

very well that he was being studied in turn. Possibly the two were measuring forces.

There was no gambling that night. Free kept the ball rolling till lights were out. Then he turned into his bunk and lay thinking.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"MOTHER, they're goin' to take him away."

It was the day on which the sentence of the court was put into effect, and the prisoners condemned to the mines were removed from the jail.

West Stanlin stood in the farmyard that had been his up to the day when a white lawyer gained it at one stroke by a few perfunctory words of defence that, for all they accomplished, might as well never have been spoken.

Betsey came to the door.

"When?"

"To-day, some says. In the mornin', others thinks. We better be startin'."

Betsey turned into the house without a word.

When West had harnessed the horse he found her waiting outside.

"I'm ready, father," she said.

For a moment their eyes met. West's were restless with a pain he could not throw off; Betsey's full of a patient, heart-broken sadness. She climbed into the vehicle, and West took the reins. His face was set and still.

They had not said much to each other since the trial—this elderly man and woman. For the greater part of the time they had sat by the kitchen hearth, staring into the embers. Now and then Betsey's hand would steal out and touch West's.

"I wonder what that po' chile is doin' now," she would say at such times, and a sob would choke the words and a tear or two steal down her cheeks unnoticed, while the silence fell again.

For the greater part of the way they did not speak as they drove to the county town to-day. There was no

more to be said. Their hearts had said it all as they sat together in almost unbroken silence in the time since the trial.

"It'll comfort him, father. He'll sure be stronger when he ain't facin' a watchin' and exultin' world plumb alone."

They were nearing their destination when Betsey spoke. West did not answer.

"You'll drive the mare home," he said, after a minute's silence. I'll be back agin as quick as I see him inside the gates. I reckon they won't let me go no further than that. Then we'll move into the cabin."

"You'll set with him, father, and tell him all we're goin' to do?"

"Set with him?" growled West, in a low, husky voice. "I'll set as near to him as I can get. I'd set there *for* him if I could. Do you think I'm ashamed o' my boy? I ain't goin' to make no trouble for him, but I'm goin' to see him to the end of his journey, and I'm goin' as his father. There won't nobody misunderstand that."

"And I'm goin' to put my arms round him agin afore he starts," said Betsey brokenly. "I'se got to."

They were nearing the county town. The jail lay closer than the station. At a turn of the road that brought them within half a mile of the latter, West's hand tightened upon the reins. The mare stopped.

"What is it, father?"

"They're goin' on ahead. He's among 'em—chained."

He made a movement to lift his hand, failed, and dropped the reins. Betsey gathered them up.

"Yes," she said. "Po chile! I sees. We'll go on with him. He'll feel less lonesome if we'se by."

The road and the moving figures upon it grew misty for a moment. Betsey's eyes were swimming with tears as she shook the reins. They had cleared when she tightened them again.

"Father, there's somethin' wrong!"

"Nothin' of no consequence. Drive on. I'm goin' with my poor boy."

His face had assumed a livid hue. The words came stiffly. Once more he made a violent effort to lift his hand, and then gave up the attempt.

"I'm powerful weak," he said. "I can't hardly set. Drive on quick. We're goin' to be behind."

But even as he spoke, the weakness extended to the lower limbs. But for Betsey's arm he could not have kept his seat. She looked into his face and recognized there the signs of no passing weakness.

"He's done grieved himself to death," she said.

His head had fallen forward. He no longer saw the prisoners on the road in front of him.

For one terrible minute Betsey hesitated. Her boy was on ahead. Her heart was crying out for a sight of his face. The mother love clamoured for a chance to comfort him once again before he was taken from her. But the dead weight upon her arm told her that immediate action was necessary. West was stricken—helpless. The husband by whose side she had slowly climbed the hill of prosperity, and by whose side she had slipped swiftly back to poverty and shame, needed her, and needed her now. She sent one longing, heart-sick look toward the boy she could not follow, and obeyed West's last command. She drove on, but the mare's head was turned in the direction of home.

"That po' chile will look for us, and go off sorer of heart for not seein' us," she said. "But it wouldn't comfort him none to see us this away. He'd be grievin' for his father, and he's got enough sorrer in his own lot, po' boy. My arms is achin' to clasp theirselves round him, but I'll sure save him the knowin' of this."

Thus it happened that West Stanlin did not ride by his son's side as he had vowed he would do, and the young man wondered, and was more than half glad that the unflinching old planter was spared this last pain.

As a further consequence, it happened that less than a week later a little old negro, with white, woolly hair, and a face that was puckered up with weariness, followed a girl into the dimness of a poorly lighted station at a late hour of the night.

"Sho', chile, I'se plumb glad to be standin' on de substantial earth agin," he said, drawing a long, hard breath. "I ain't sayin' dem shakin', rollin', never restin' cars ain't a convenience when we'se wantin' to 'nihilate space by tearin' plumb acrost de world, but, honey, deys drefful disturbin'. Dis ole nigger got to stop and let his thoughts ketch up wid him. Uncle Pete was sho' born in de ole days, when de legs of de hoss and de thoughts of a man was reckoned mighty quick things. Dey's all behind now."

"It'll rest us to walk along the road," said the girl wearily. "It's moonlight out there."

The glare of a lamp fell upon her face as she passed beyond the limits of the station, followed by the old man. It was white, and drawn, and quivering, but beneath the pain there was manifest a steadfast purpose farther reaching than that of finding rest after a long day's travel. Magnolia and Uncle Pete went out to the cold, quiet highway, and the moon shone down upon them, and a great stillness surrounded them.

"Bless de Lord, dar's allus peace to look forrard to," said the old man slowly. "Dar's de racket, and de strivin', and de loss, and de pain, but arter dat all done dar's de long way space of peace. We-all's got to git dere yit, honey."

They walked on in silence, and the peace of the night stilled even the tumult in the girl's soul. It was a tender, rather than a passionate face, that was lifted to the moonlight when Magnolia stood before West Stanlin's door in the middle of the night.

"An' dis is de house what opened its hospiterble door to my boy Gloss. De mercy of de Lord rest upon it.

Honey, de Lord sho' regards a good man, and de owner of dis house is in His keepin'."

Uncle Pete mounted the steps and knocked at the door. After some hesitation it was opened by Betsey Stanlin. The old man stepped forward.

"I'se come, ma'am, to see if de Lord's got any work for Uncle Pete in dis place," he said. "My lil' gal sho' couldn't stay back dar in Hebron no single minute longer. She constrained to come, and I not find it in dis ole heart to let her out my sight dese troublous times. I sho' got to go wid her."

But Betsey had caught sight of Magnolia beyond. Without a word she set down her lamp and went out into the moonlight.

"Come in, chile. You loved him—my po' boy."

"We thought we could help," said Magnolia gently, after that long embrace. "We did not know—now—after all the expense—whether you had all the help you needed."

"You'se holped my lil' gal mightily, ma'am," broke in Uncle Pete, "and dis house opened to my boy Gloss when he was lonesome and a stranger. Ma'am, if dar's a thing on dis earth dat dis ole nigger can do to he'p lighten de sorrer dat de Lord's seed fit to let fall, I'll be powerful glad to do it."

"Come in, come in. I'se glad you'se come," said Betsey brokenly. "We-uns ain't strangers, for we'se all lovin' each other."

"And your husband, ma'am?" said Uncle Pete. "Has the Lord raised him up since dat letter you done wrote?"

Betsey shook her head.

"He's grievin' himself to death," she said, "mourin' for that po' chile. Sorrer's sure laid its hand on his heart. Ah, me! it's cert'nly nearin' the end. Sorrer and life ends together. There's hearts that aches till they breaks. Me and West's got that ache sore."

The weakness that had seized upon West Stanlin when

he saw his boy, bound, and about to be sent away, was of the nature of paralysis. He had so far recovered that he could speak, though with difficulty. His lower limbs were still powerless.

A half smile crossed his face when he saw Magnolia.

"That's right. You ain't—give my boy up—now all things are agin him," he said.

A swift wave of colour crossed the fair young face.

"If this had not happened, he would have come to me," the girl said. "Now—I am going to him."

A flash of the old light came to the negro planter's eyes.

"That boy Gloss was—no fool—when he bragged on his sister," he said. "My girl—there ain't nothin' will put new life into that poor boy—like your goin' to him."

Uncle Pete was not wrong in supposing that in West Stanlin's illness a man about the house could be useful. The old man was as active as in his young years, and Betsey's weary face grew a little less sorrowful in the days when Uncle Pete and his "lil' gal" stayed with her. Before they left, West was removed to the little old cabin. It was his during his life. This concession he had won from the white lawyer before he agreed to accept his terms. Thirty acres of land went with the cabin.

Here Uncle Pete drove and housed the stock. The old man worked with a will that no difficulty could daunt.

"Dey sho' neber spared deyselves where my boy Gloss and my lil' gal was consarned," he said. "Dis nigger glad to work night as well as day to keep dey-uns from loss."

The coming of these two had brought a faint uprising of hope to the planter and his wife.

"It sure lifts the weight off my heart that you'se goin' to that po' chile," said Betsey. "I knows he's grievin' sore that me and West wasn't there to see him start. Missin' us when he come to that station cert'nly drove the lonesomeness home deeper. He don't know why it

was, and I ain't wantin' to tell him in no letter. Written words is cold. They says less and more than you want. You'll know, honey, how to put the comfort along with the sorrer so's that po' chile don't hev to bear no more pain than he's forced. Chile, my heart's plumb breakin' with longin' to get there and comfort him."

Magnolia's hand stole into hers. There had come a soft light into the girl's eyes.

"I can be some comfort to him," she said. "I'm going there to stay right by him. I'll never leave Birmingham till he's free to come back to you."

"Bless you, honey," said Betsey brokenly. "If anything could heal that po' chile's wounded spirit it'll be hevin' you near to him."

There was a long silence between them. Both were thinking of Free.

"Tell him we ain't wantin', West and me; we'se well provided for," said Betsey at last. "Chile, don't you let him grieve thinkin' we'se tastin' want. We ain't, and we ain't goin' to. If the good God wills it, West'll get a heap better yet, and I'se good for a lot o' work. I'se worked all my life, and I ain't forgot how. Thirty acres'll yield all me and West can eat. Tell him we ain't sufferin', on'y for want of him."

The brave mother heart never faltered as she sent her messages.

"Don't tell him no sadness more'n you can help," she said. "Me and West's got money yet. 'Mind him of that. It'll comfort him to know it. There's the money that was put up for bail for him. That's ourn. And there's things to sell yet. And now West's laid low, and most everything's swept away, the white feelin'll maybe stop workin'. We'se humble enough now. We ain't tryin' arter no high places. I'se hopin' the hate'll die out. Tell him we ain't in no danger. We'se done got to the bottom."

When Uncle Pete's work was finished, and the old

man could not find another thing to be done upon the place until summer came, when the stock and such crops as were not yet sold were housed on the little farm, and everything was easy for Betsey to manage, the old negro and Magnolia were ready to start.

It was then that there came a restless eagerness into West Stanlin's face.

"My girl—you're sure doin' for me and Betsey what gives us the right to call you daughter—and you'll be my boy's wife yet, in spite of what's happened," he said.

The words came with less effort now. The time of Magnolia's stay had wrought much improvement.

West noted the bright flush that rose to the girl's forehead, and his lips smiled.

"You mustn't say no to what I'm goin' to ask," he continued. "Gloss give you to Free—and you're goin' to my boy to comfort him. You ain't goin' without money.—No, listen. You're nothin' but a girl. I'm an old man. There ain't no place nowhere where money don't smooth the way. You can't do as much—for him nor you—without it. Me and Betsey's got enough. We'll both rest easier to know you've took this."

He lay back, tired with the effort, and looked at her half appealingly, half in command. She would have refused the hundred dollars he pressed upon her, but he grew worried and excited.

"Honey, you'se wrong," said Betsey. "You'se wantin' to do the best for that po' chile. You can't do it without money. You and him's goin' to be one. What you does for yourself you'se doin' for him. It'll sure be a powerful comfort to me and West to know you'se started to go to him, and that you has enough to do anything he wants when you gets there."

And while two sore old hearts were planning to send to him comfort, and one young one, hardly less sore, was leaping forward to the meeting, full of its own projects of which he was centre and circumference, the young

man for whom they sorrowed and planned was fighting out his battle alone. He had reached a crisis in his life. He thought he had reached the end of his life—as he had, life signifying that which it had hitherto signified to him. Pride of acknowledged integrity, pride of the position won for him by his father's labour, the enjoyments of existence, the freedom other men took as a right—all were lost to him. His artist soul felt the deprivation of every form of beauty. The dark, damp mine, the loathsomeness of prison life, the utterly depressing surroundings of the neglected and not particularly clean ward, and the contact with men taken from the lowest and worst of both races, were a constant torture to him. Only twice in the twenty-four hours did he feel the free breath of heaven, and meet the eye of the sun with no barrier between. Already he was learning to look forward to those intervals of comparative freedom. They were short enough, lasting only while he traversed the pathway between the prison and the mine, closely watched by the guards in their little lookout houses over the path. He fell into the habit of drawing long breaths of the pure outdoor air as he passed along. He could not get enough of it. Like everything else that was good, it had gone out of his life, except in these brief moments.

It takes some courage to live when life is simply deprivation, when the good is all behind and the evil all before; but it is at such a time that the hero is born—his birth pangs the death of his soul's joy.

In the case of Free Stanlin it was at first but a feeble birth. The impulse to look at life from the point of view of the helper instead of the enjoyer was the first break in the despair that had taken hold upon him. That impulse did not die. From the day when he looked with conscious interest into the face of the young negro, Cleve Boynton, and stirred himself to preserve him, for one evening at least, from the clutches of Pete Sanderson, new thoughts stirred within him. He began to see hu-

manity, and especially negro humanity, in a different light. Hitherto he had stood aloof and looked down on the weak and the wicked. Now he took the trouble to look in on them. The effect was different. From those first faint stirrings of interest the feeling deepened. His fellow prisoners became to him personalities. He began to know them, and knowing them he ceased to classify them broadly as "the worthless." He saw shades of distinction, possibilities in one life that another lacked.

He began to contrast their lives with his own—which he had considered ended. Even here, where all had the same tasks and limitations, in the utter barrenness of prison existence, comparison failed. Many of these souls were narrower than the prison limits. It was not their souls, but their bodies, that craved freedom—especially from labour. For the rest, they had room enough, for they had never known freedom.

The freedom of knowledge, of an open door for the soul, of the power of the intellect, the freedom of the moral nature and of the will, were his yet, in spite of prison walls. But these men were shut in by walls higher than the twelve-foot fence that surrounded the prison yard—walls of ignorance, of impotence of will, of lack of moral force. And yet some of them had capabilities for better things—the germs of manhood yet undeveloped.

Free Stanlin began to see the negro as he had never seen him before. He began to look at the possibilities in him, as well as at the failures; and they were to be found, even here, in this most unpropitious place for such a search.

Without intending to do so, he had taken the white man's estimate of the negro—a result of the white man's contempt that has been, perhaps, of all others the most fatal. No race can ever rise so long as the best men and women in its own ranks look upon it with scorn. Until the higher types of manhood and womanhood among a

people are enthusiasts in its cause, until they believe in the possibilities of its greatness, possibilities for the masses as well as for the few, there is little hope of raising those masses. When uplifting is, to the better class among any people, synonymous with shaking off from their feet the dust of their own race, and preferring admission amongst men of another nationality to that leadership in their own to which their higher position should point, then is there little hope for the race to which they belong. Leaders, heroes, something to imitate—this is the demand of humanity, black and white, and the supplying of that demand with the right kind of hero is the making of a people.

Unconsciously, Free had fallen into the selfishness—very natural, perhaps, but very much to be deplored—of most of the rising men of his own race. He had thought of achievement as making his way among white men. He had taken his public to be a white public. And all around him were black men looking up to him, and he did not see them—except as so many darkies. He chafed at the scorn of the white man, and he passed on that scorn to the lower ranks of his own people, and did not even know he was doing it.

Now he was waking up. He saw the negro for the first time. He was shut in with him here, for few white men, proportionally, were here in the mine. He was in a negro world, and he began to study the negro. He began to measure himself and his life by a new scale of measurement furnished by contact with these negro convicts. The action had a peculiar effect. He had often before, in his eagerness to stand well with the white man, been ashamed of his people; now, for the first time in his life, he was ashamed of himself.

And now he began to prove that he had in him the making of a man. Possibly ninety-nine men out of every hundred are made, or partially made, by their surroundings. The hundredth, whose manhood asserts it-

self even in the wreck of his world, is the man of strong soul which nothing can ruin. Everything Free Stanlin had hoped for and lived for was gone. There was only manhood left. The crisis proved that he had strength of soul to seize the gem and let the setting go.

After that first whirlwind of despair had passed over him, he let the dead past bury its dead. Ringing in his ears day and night were the words of Gloss Boyd, heard often in the old days at Tuskadela: "I sure want to reach down a helpin' hand." He began a new life, not without heart-sick longings for the old, and hot, angry fights with pain and despair. He had his days of defeat—days when the sensitive shrinking from this coarse, rough life ate into his heart—days when he told himself it had been better he had never been born, and felt life to be a curse—days when he could have spurned humanity, and especially negro humanity, as so much hopeless trash, not worth an effort—days when the world's estimate of life, the world of the white man, and the most thoughtless and inconsiderate of the white men at that, seemed the only standard there was. Then a blind rage possessed him, and he could have set law and regulations at defiance. At such times he dug out his stint of coal with a mad frenzy that stood for no obstacle; and then stopped. Beyond that prescribed task his arms refused to labour, and he would rush away to some dark, worked-out passage, where the thud of the pick and the rush of falling coal came as distant sounds, if they came at all, and fight out his battle alone. On such days his face would grow worn and haggard like the face of an old man, and he would come up when the signal for the cessation of work was given, with the weary, bent shoulders of one who had laboured till flesh and spirit failed. But in the end the victory of manhood over despair was always won. The rush of hopeless regret was always met and vanquished by the upspringing hope of effort, the growth of the soul that gives the lie to the Satanic suggestion of a

death in life. The happiness of life might be dead, but the duties of life remained, and the young negro took them up in their bareness, and, though he never dreamed of it, became a hero in the effort.

His was the work of no carpet knight, enjoying the honours for which he had not fought. He found no honours, and the pain of his life turned his youth into sudden manhood. But day by day he found and met some want in the lives of the men around him; bit by bit, he acquired an influence over them. He was not aggressively helpful. He made no superhuman efforts to draw men within the circle of his influence. But he stood by in the spirit of brotherliness, and he was stronger than they.

More than once, when by reason of failing strength, caused by long labour in the unhealthy atmosphere of the mine, some man's allotted task was yet incomplete when the hour for the evening signal drew near; when failure stared him in the face, and he weakly wiped the heat drops from his forehead and looked first at the unfilled truck, and then onward to the punishment that awaited him, a footstep at his side caused him to turn hastily. Then a pick would work steadily on his seam of coal, and a full truck would go up that was not credited to Free Stanlin.

By one friendly act after another the young negro won the confidence of the men, till he began to be a power in the prison. In the evenings, when gambling and quarrelling and unholy mirth were rampant in his ward, there was gradually drawn into one corner of that big room a group gathered about the young man. He was not preaching to them or lecturing them. He was simply telling stories—the old stories of classical lore, or the new ones of modern literature. He was a good talker when he put his soul into his words, and in those evenings Free Stanlin learned to let his soul have play.

The audience increased as the time went on. Some who had joined the ranks of the gamblers from sheer

inability to live this blank, hopeless life, without the excitement of some form of recreation, deserted to the new amusement. Pete Sanderson had fewer victims.

Once it happened that Free found his words inadequate to bring his idea before his listeners. Then a pencil and paper came into requisition. A rough sketch accomplished in a few minutes what language had failed to do. After that the young artist let his fingers talk as well as his tongue.

The expenditure of a few dollars, earned by work over and above his daily task, bought colours and paper and brushes. The men would stand for an hour watching him create for them a story that appealed to the eye. His fingers, a little awkward at first over the new task, gained experience and confidence as he went on. Before they understood what he was doing for them, these men began to love beauty and to recognize it—beauty of form, beauty of expression, the beautiful in life. For every story that made them hold their breath with suspense, or laugh till the dreary prison rang with their mirth, put the beauty of higher manhood and womanhood where it should be—in the forefront—and left the maimed, and the weak, and the failing in moral life in the cold background. Without ever realizing the change that was taking place, these uneducated, undisciplined convicts learned to admire truth and strength of soul, and to scorn deceit and meanness—at least among their pictured heroes. And as that which men admire must of necessity influence their lives more or less, they were a little less base of soul, a little nearer the plane of normal manhood, than before they followed the history and admired the achievements of some hero of romance.

It was not much to do—to occupy pleasantly the unfilled hours of a lot of convicts who were, many of them, the offscouring of the earth, but because one man did the small and apparently insignificant thing, and did it with all his heart, a purer atmosphere began to prevail in that

prison ward. Some men stood aloof. Some resented the action of this newcomer. These last were the men who had made gain by trading on the weaknesses of their fellow-prisoners. Of them, Pete Sanderson was the strongest and most aggressive. But even that burly negro had no wish to come to close quarters with the young man whose knowledge and force of will more than made up for any excess of physical strength on the part of the aforetime leader of the prison ward.

The boy Cleve Boynton entirely departed from his allegiance to the gambling, threatening Pete, and followed the new leader with hot enthusiasm. There was something almost pitiful in the way in which he attached himself to Free.

"I sho' wisht I was like you-uns," he said, watching Free sew on a button in business-like fashion. "You-all's got more'n we-uns somewheres inside you. You're shet up here same as we-uns, but, lor, there's a sight o' difference. I done thought you'd hev to come down to our way o' doin' when you got clean druv to it, but I reckon you'll be more like to hev us round to yourn. I wisht I'd got as much inside of me as you-uns hev."

Free smiled.

"Why didn't you go to school?" he asked.

"Warn't no chance. School only tuk in two months in a year. I done went when I was a pickaninny, but ten months o' forgittin' sho' more'n unlarnt two months o' schoolin'. I done got backerder every blessed year."

Free laughed.

"You can read a little, though," he said.

"That's right," replied Cleve. "I was on the road to bein' a mighty good scholard onct. If that there lady had kep' on, I should 'a been 'most as good a one as you-uns. Lor, I jes' shot ahead that year I went to school to her. She'd been there the year afore, but I was off at granny's, and when I come back I tell you I was proud to see her bringin' our people on."

"Who was she?" asked Free.

"A white lady from the North, bless her. She come to our town for her health, and she see the white chillen gittin' their nine months' schoolin' right along, and the black boys and gals hevin' two months. The trustees was all white men, you see, and they done couldn't spare more'n two months' school money for the niggers. Lor, she was a good un, she was. She sho' cared. She built us a church where we had school all the week, and she got teachers, and teached us herself. There wasn't none of us boys and gals that didn't want to go to her."

"And you went?" said Free.

"Went? I'd 'a walked on my head to 'a done anything she told me. Lor, she'd got a heart that could feel for a black chile same as a white one. She'd meet our leasest gals and boys, and if she see one of 'em with its clothes all busted out o' the buttons, she'd stop right there and fix 'em up and make that little un neat. She give us a Christmas tree at Christmas, and everything jes' like we was white. She was a good un."

"Did she go away?" inquired Free.

The boy's eyes blazed.

"Go away? She was druv away. The white people what had all they wanted theirselves done druv her clean outer the place. They couldn't bear to see us hevin' anythin' good. Didn't want no upsettin' notions put into niggers' heads. They'd meet that blessed woman and abuse her on the street, and they done sent her threatenin' letters. She wasn't real stout and strong, and she jes' couldn't stand it. She give up and went back North. Lor, I tell you we-uns was like to have died o' grievin'. The church stan's there now, and ain't used by nobody, and our gals and boys gits two months' schoolin' in the year same as afore she come. I'd 'a been diff'rent if she hadn't never went away. She cared what become o' me, and nobody else never did."

"Why don't you go to the night school in this building?" asked Free.

Cleve shook his head.

"A feller ain't goin' to work all day and muddle up his brains with larnin' at night," he said. "I'm too plumb tired for such doin's as that."

"See here," said Free. "You want to make a man with something in him. You can't have anything in you if you don't put it there."

"No, I don't," retorted Cleve. "I'm only admirin' somethin' in somebody else. It's too plumb hard for me to put it inside myself."

Free regarded him doubtfully for a moment.

"I'm going to have a look at that school," he said. "What's to hinder you from coming a night or two a week, and picking up a little knowledge?"

"Can't come it," replied Cleve. "I sho' got to go on the way I'm goin'. It's too powerful hard for me anyways. I ain't aimin' to make it harder."

Nevertheless the time came when the boy occupied one of the seats at the night school three evenings a week, and when reading was no longer a mystery to him. But that was later, when the influence that was beginning to work in the prison had reached out and strengthened. At present he simply clung to the stronger manhood of the young negro who was so different from any one he had known before, and ceased going downhill.

The higher victories of Free Stanlin's work were yet in the future. At the beginning there was only the fight —the quiet, unassuming fight against the evils prevalent in the prison ward, and the harder fight against his own despair.

As those earlier days passed, he had also the burden of a great anxiety. It was three weeks since he came to the mine, and but two letters had been received from home. Both were in Betsey's handwriting, and were full of the overflowing love of Betsey's heart. She told

him he need not fear for her and his father, for they were going to move into the little cabin, and there was enough to keep them from want. In spite of her assurances, however, Free's heart misgave him. He could not understand his father's silence. Betsey did not possess the skill of the ready writer, though her heart found plenty to say to her boy. It was upon West that the correspondence usually devolved, but as yet Free had had no letter from him. When his boy was away from home before, the negro planter had never been slow to write to him, but now the young man had addressed more than one letter to his father, and there had come no answer except in messages contained in his mother's letters.

Free began to imagine all sorts of evil. He was heart-sick and weary, and full of foreboding. The hard, exhausting labour of the mine was welcome, for it left him little time to think. But when Sunday came, and there was no work to be done, a flood of tender memories swept over him. He could not get away from them, nor from his fears. He chafed against the prison walls that kept him from going to the assistance of his loved ones. Hitherto it had seemed of little moment where he was, since all the world was dead to him. But now he longed for freedom, if only for a day.

The afternoon sun was falling across the desolate ward. Why was it that those sunbeams brought before him a girl's face, tender, loving, beautiful? He could not put her out of his thoughts to-day—his Magnolia, the gift of his friend Gloss.

He stood beneath one of the windows, with the sunlight playing upon his face, and let the bitter-sweet memories come. The blessed, free sunshine and the girl's face seemed to belong to each other. His heart ached for her, for the touch of her hand, for one long look into her eyes. It was nearly spring-time. And in the summer she was to have been his.

There were many coming and going in the ward, visiting the prisoners. Free stood with his back toward the long room and his face to the sunlight that streamed in above him. He did not notice that the door opened again—it had opened so many times this afternoon. He did not know that almost every pair of eyes but his own turned to watch the girl who had just entered. It was no wonder they turned. They did not often see a vision so fair and young and beautiful in that place. Despite its sadness, there was a light upon the girl's face. She was accompanied by an old negro, whose first thought, without doubt, was the welfare of the girl by his side. His attention was concentrated upon her. When the door closed behind them, she looked round the long ward inquiringly. Then a rosy flush mounted to her very forehead. She spoke a few low words to the negro at her side.

"No, honey, I'll jes' stay here and watch over you from a distance," he said, and the girl went on alone.

Free Stanlin did not know that the face of which he was dreaming was coming toward him. The sunlight was in his eyes, and something—a mist that for a moment turned the light into one bright blur—had come before them. He was thinking that this girl was outside his life, and trying to rejoice, for her sake, that it was so.

"Free!"

The word was soft enough to be an echo of his dream. He turned quickly and caught both her hands in his. For a moment he did not speak, unless that long, hungry look into her face were speech.

"Dear, you should not have come. You must go away," he said then, in a low voice that thrilled with love and sorrow. "This is no place for you. I cannot bear to see you here."

She smiled up into his face.

"Just now you cannot see me anywhere else," she said.

"Do you mean to say you did not want to see me at all?"

The words were saucy, but the smile was tender. The tears were too near the surface. She gave her shoulders a little, impatient shake.

"Yes, I mean just that," he said, in the same low, tense voice.

She looked at him, startled. He still held her hands, in a grip that was almost painful.

"I have blessed heaven for just one thing since I came here—that you would never share this disgrace," he said.

She looked up into his eyes, and some of the spirit of the old Magnolia shone in her own.

"I would rather share disgrace with you than have honour without you," she said. "Free, if this had come to me, would you stay away?"

A low laugh was the answer.

"Very well," she said. "That is settled. Uncle Pete has come with me. We are going to live here—in Pratt City—as near to you as possible. We shall stay here until—until you come to fetch me."

It was hard to have to remember that curious eyes were fixed upon them. He wanted to draw her to him, and touch those determined lips with his own. But he refrained. He even dropped her hands. But he could not keep the joy and the hunger out of his eyes.

"It is not right to spoil your life," he began, but she interrupted him.

"No, and it could not but be spoiled if I were in one place and you in another," she said. "Even Uncle Pete saw that, and agreed that it was best to come here."

What could he say? He took the joy that had come to him, and satisfied his eyes with the sight of her face. And when that first hungry longing was satisfied, she gave him Betsey's messages, softening the sorrow of the news she brought with tender words of hope. Later on,

Uncle Pete put his wrinkled hand into that of the young man, and looked up into his face.

"I sho' been wantin' to see de friend that done stood by my boy Gloss," he said. "I'se lookin' on de face of a good man, and it cert'nly do my ole heart good. Don't you be afeared, my son. De good Lord dat sees a mighty sight furder dan us short-seein' mortals, has got your ways in His keepin'. He sho' leads His people through de deep-wooded darkness where de shinin' seems gone for eber. But de light'll come on de path yit, honey, if you jes' goes walkin' on."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Pratt City was lively with the bustle of a Southern mining village after work hours. The main street of the little place was doing a roaring business. Its diminutive wooden stores, so strongly suggestive of an enlarged packing case set up on the street front, were filled with people. Set in the midst of great steel and mining industries, Pratt City felt its importance as a connection of the big city of Birmingham, only a few miles away.

In one of the newer of the packing-case business establishments, a white-headed negro, with a spotless apron girded about him, served a wholesome supper to hungry negro workmen seated around three tables which almost filled the little place. The old man had a ready word on his tongue for every fresh customer that came in. The tables filled and emptied and filled again. "Boyd's Restaurant," in large letters over the door, apprised strangers that refreshment was to be had here. The initiated needed no printed notice to inform them that a better cooked and more liberal meal, accompanied by a heartier welcome, awaited them here than at any other place open to them in Pratt City. The old negro who was the presiding genius of the tables knew every customer by name, and took a personal interest in his enjoyment of the meal that had been skilfully prepared for his delectation. Uncle Pete had ministered to the needs of the Pratt City working men of the negro race for nearly eighteen months, and he understood them and their tastes.

"De nigger and de white man am powerful much alike in de main," he said. "When a man come in hungry, let him be white or black, he drefful fidgetin' and quar'l-

some; but when his mouth plumb satisfied wid good things, he forgit he eber feel like kickin' at de world. He mild as a lamb and sweet as sugar cane. Uncle Pete sho' know how to please 'em. He got somethin' to satisfy ebery mouth among 'em."

It was the indefatigable work of a pair of hands behind the scenes that made Uncle Pete's task easy. Magnolia's cooking was of the very best. For her skill therein she was indebted to the kindly interest of one of the teachers at Fiske, who had persuaded a class of the girls to take lessons in plain, wholesome cookery, of the kind needed in every home. Magnolia proved an adept at the art. The kitchen in the rear of the restaurant sent forth odours appetizing enough to tempt hungry humanity to cross the threshold of the outer room. Beyond that room none came. Uncle Pete fetched from the mysterious inner sanctum the steaming dishes that were set down with a flourish before the customer.

"Dar no need for you to be comin' in contact wid eberybody, honey," he said. "Uncle Pete more fit to deal wid dem dan my lil' gal. You cook de victuals, and me and dem niggers betwixt us will dispose of 'em, sho'."

So Magnolia cooked, and Uncle Pete served, and Boyd's restaurant flourished.

The face of the girl became more tender and womanly as the months passed. The Sunday afternoons spent by the side of the young prisoner, to whom those hours were the one light of the week, were setting their impress upon her. The love of these two had grown very deep in the dark months of Free's imprisonment. After that first passionate protest, the young man never again bade her stay away. All the week he thought of her, and when Sunday came he looked into her eyes, and thanked God that there was one good yet left to him.

She refused to let him believe that life was ended for him in this four years of prison experience. She talked

of the future, and told him of her successes in business. She brought her difficulties to him, and her victories, and claimed his sympathy and advice in the venture she and Uncle Pete were making. Before he realized it, he had again a lively interest in the outside world. How could he help it, when it was Magnolia who was making for herself a place in the business life of Pratt City. He forgot the prison in thinking of the restaurant. He grew familiar with it, as she did with his work among the prisoners. For it was not long before she knew all about his efforts among the men. She entered into them with enthusiasm, adding little suggestions of her own, and bringing him books and papers.

The days of despair came less frequently now, though there were times when the thought of Magnolia added torture to the shame of the accusation that rested upon him. The confinement of prison life, and the long hours passed underground in the dust and impure atmosphere of the mine, told upon him more during the second year of his imprisonment. The work was hard, and though healthy and not wanting in strength, he had never been particularly robust. His arm tired more quickly. It was more of a sacrifice to go to the aid of some hard-pushed prisoner whose longer labour in the mine had left him weak and spiritless.

The physical strain made the mental struggle, when it came, more severe. There were times when Free yielded to despair, but they did not come often. Magnolia never saw him when the darkness was upon him. How could it brood down over him when he was looking for her? Nevertheless, more than once a sharp, imperfectly defined fear shot to her heart. His sentence was not yet half worked out, and she saw an alarming difference in him. She refused to give place to the fear, hiding it even from Uncle Pete. The old man always went with her to the prison.

"I come all de way from Hebron to take care o' my

lil' gal," he said. "Dar more dangers in one day in dese chock-full towns, where de people gaders togeder and you don't know half o' dem you meets, dan in a whole year of days in de silence and de peaceableness of Hebron. I sho' see my lil' gal safe to Free Stanlin's side ebery time."

Uncle Pete's care of his "lil' gal" had been more assiduous since they started for Pratt City than ever before.

"I sho' neber realize de dangers what lurkin' round de footsteps of de nigger people till I done sent my boy and gal inter de great world," he said. "De happenin's of each secedin' year cert'nly open Uncle Pete's eyes to de need of watchfulness. Dis yere land of America a mighty safe place for de white boy and gal, but dar am dangers unnumerable in de path of de nigger. He sho' got to watch out. Uncle Pete older dan his lil' gal. He got de nose to scent danger. He sho' gwine see no harm come to her."

The old man was extra busy to-night. Every seat at the tables was filled, and only a few had been served. He was bustling round with the agility of a young man, his tongue keeping pace with his nimble fingers. A savory steak sent up a delicious odour to nostrils rendered keen by hunger as Uncle Pete crossed the room with a cleverly packed tray. Another customer, coming in at the door, almost ran into the old man and his appetizing load.

"Hullo! Hold on there. I want some of that."

"Lor, chile, don't be in a hurry," replied Uncle Pete. "Dar plenty nuff for all, but sho' all can't eat at once. You jes' wait till one o' these gen'lemen's done eatin', and Uncle Pete'll cert'nly serve you a supper what'll make your mouth water."

The negro laughed good-naturedly.

"It waters now," he said. "That's all right. You go ahead. I'll wait my turn."

He crossed the room and stood leaning on the back of a chair, looking down on the more fortunate possessors of the seats.

"Heared the news?" he asked.

Every man who was not at the moment engaged in the important business of conveying food to his mouth turned his head.

"No. What?"

"Prison Number One has had an accident at the mine."

Knives and forks stopped action for a moment.

"When?" came in a chorus of voices.

"Dunno. They're keepin' dark. Heared it half an hour ago."

A cup of coffee went down with a jerk, and a dark brown stream flowed over one of Magnolia's clean tablecloths. Uncle Pete's fingers had grown clumsy, or perhaps they were shaking too much to hold the saucer. The old man rested his tray on the edge of the table and turned to the speaker.

"How many was hurt?" he asked, in a voice that had a tremor in it.

"Dunno. They're keepin' it mighty quiet. Some says there's two killed."

"How did it happen?"

Uncle Pete had lowered his voice. He glanced apprehensively toward the door at the other end of the room.

"Lor, there ain't no tellin'. They're sayin' everything. Fur as I can make it out they was goin' to blast at the furder end of a passage, and the men was gittin' away, when what should a nigger that was workin' at the openin' of the passage do but set off a charge he'd stole and put in to help himself out with his coal. Blowed the roof off, so they say, and blocked the passage plumb up afore they-uns could git out. The charge at t'other end was nuff to blow 'em all into kingdom come, shet up there with it."

"I'll bet there wasn't a man saved," interposed a listener excitedly.

"They're a-sayin' there wasn't more'n one or two hurt," continued the speaker. "A prisoner what was on the safe side o' that fallin' coal done flung himself through the lumps like he was crazy, and got inter the passage 'fore it was plumb blocked up. Then he went for the fuse at t'other end and got it out, all alight, and stamped on it. He'd 'a come through all right, but a smaller charge he didn't know nothin' about 'sploded right where he stood. Blowed him to bits. Stanlin, some says his name was. They had to dig like anything to git them men out. I guess there warn't much of him left to git."

A thrill of excitement passed through the crowd. For a moment the figures in the room danced before the eyes of Uncle Pete. Then he lifted his tray, distributed the cups and dishes, and went off for a fresh supply.

"My po' lil' gal!"

For fully half a minute Uncle Pete stood with his hand on the inner door, forcing his face into its accustomed cheery lines. Then he turned the handle.

"Dar lots o' victuals wanted to-night, honey. Seems like everybody likes your cookin'. Dey's done filled all de tables, and—"

"Uncle Pete, I'm going to him."

"Lor, honey!" he said, and set down his tray.

The girl's face was white as the apron that encircled Uncle Pete's waist, but her voice was firm and quiet.

"He's not dead. He *can't* be," she said. "I'm going. You can take all that's cooked, and then shut up. I'll put everything ready. There's enough for all that are in now, and maybe for others. You will have to manage alone."

"Honey," he said, in a low, tender voice, "it ain't what dis ole nigger do. I sho' can manage. It's you, chile. You mustn't go dar alone. It's night time, and you'se

sore heart-troubled, honey. You cert'nly needs Uncle Pete more'n common."

"I shall not take any harm," she said. "You must stay and serve supper. It would take an hour to empty the place. I can be off in fifteen minutes. It—it may be the last chance to see him."

Her voice was still very low and quiet, though it broke once over the words.

"De good God go wid my lil' gal," said the old man. "De floods is risin' sore."

A shrill whistle or two from the outer room reminded him that his customers were waiting. He hastily filled his tray and disappeared.

In the hospital of prison Number One the doctor had done his work. Two or three bandaged heads lay on as many pillows. The turmoil and fear of the first moments had subsided. The injuries were slight, so far as the majority of the wounded were concerned. In the bed nearest the door lay the only man who was seriously hurt. His dark, handsome face was drawn with pain. For the time he had sunk into the stupor of exhaustion. The doctor stood at the foot of the bed looking down at the man who had that day saved many lives. He shook his head.

"He may pull through, but it will be a long while before he'll be any more use here, and—he may be off our hands before morning," he said in a low voice.

The man addressed nodded.

"We haven't lost by *him,* anyhow," he said. "That was going to be a nasty accident."

"Doctor, if it's as near as that, will you do me a favour?"

The eyes of the patient in that bed by the door were open now, and fixed on the doctor's face. There was eager entreaty in them.

"I don't know that it *is* so near," replied the doctor quickly. "I only said it might be."

"Then because it may be, will you let them come to me—the only friends I have here? It is not far to send —to Boyd's restaurant, in Pratt City. It may be too late in the morning."

Free Stanlin's voice had grown nervous and excited. The doctor turned to the man by his side. The manager looked doubtfully at the patient.

"It's against the regulations," he began, "but—There, keep still. I'll send."

But at that moment the door opened and the head of a negro was thrust in.

"There's a woman wantin' to see you, sah."

The words were jerked out toward the manager of the prison.

"To see me? What does she want?"

"Wants to git in here, I reckon."

"Kick her out. This ain't no time for women to be comin' around."

The man hesitated.

"She's arter seein' *him*."

He nodded toward the patient by the door. The overseer's eyes turned in the same direction. Then he went out.

That night Uncle Pete walked up and down, back and forth, past the different entrances to the prison—waiting. He did not attempt to get in, either at the big gates, or at any of the office doors. He understood that it would be useless. But through the long, silent hours he waited. From the moment when he had satisfied the hunger of the last supper seeker, locked up the little restaurant, and hurried off to prison Number One, until the day broke in the eastern sky, Uncle Pete walked back and forth waiting for his "lil' gal."

"She sho' ain't gwine come back in de lone darkness widout Uncle Pete," he said. "It bad nuff she go alone. De returnin' shall be diff'rent."

The darkness, however, belonged to the past when she

came out of the prison gate. Her face was quivering and weary, but the look that had been upon it when he saw her last was gone. Uncle Pete came toward her with both hands outstretched.

"Honey!" he said, and stood looking into her face, holding her hands in his.

"He won't die," she said. "I am sure of it. He is hurt—the doctor does not know how much. But he will get better."

"De good God be praised!"

He was looking into her face. He saw the light in it.

"He saved them all," she said. "The others who were injured told me about it. There were many in the passage. Pete Sanderson was there. He is subdued and grateful—as meek as a lamb. He hung round the door this morning crying like a child. They—Uncle Pete, the manager says he'll be no more use yet, and he has saved them from a bad accident. He is to be recommended for a pardon."

Uncle Pete understood then the source of the light upon the girl's face. Like a flash it spread to his own.

"De dawnin's sho' come out o' de darkness," he said. "We'll bring him home to we-uns."

Two months later there was a simple wedding in a little house in Pratt City. There were no guests, save one boy who hovered round with a radiant fidgetiness that bade fair to upset everybody's arrangements. Cleve Boynton's term in the mine had expired, and he had followed his hero and friend to freedom. His earlier attraction toward Free Stanlin had developed into a lasting affection that was lifting the boy out of the depths from which he had seemed to have no moral force to raise himself. What he would not do for the sake of his own future, he would do to please Free. He went to work with a determination that nothing could tire. He was not the only one among the prisoners to stand by the bed of the man who had not hesitated to offer his life for

them, and vow a change of front. But he was the first to get out of the prison and put his new resolutions into practice. To-day he was radiantly happy. For the first time Free had been lifted from his bed and allowed to sit in a chair.

They had waited for this day. It was to confirm to Free Stanlin the gift made long ago by his friend Gloss Boyd.

"Mine at last," he said, when the simple ceremony was over, and he and Magnolia were alone together. "Dear, I thought it would never come."

She smiled, but there were tears in her eyes.

"It is the beginning of the good," she said. "Some day, when you can bear the journey, we will go away—into the country. It will make you strong to be out of doors all day, and Uncle Pete and I can work the land."

He smiled at her fondly.

"The world is all one to me now," he said. "It had but a single treasure left in it—and that is mine."

"It shall hold others for you yet," she said. "We will make a home where the past can be left to take care of itself. It was not of our making, and we have done with it. We will make for ourselves a future."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"Dat hunderd dollars has sho' doubled itself ober and ober, honey. Dar wouldn't hev been no Boyd's restaurant if Mr. West Stanlin hadn't been plumb far-seein' nuff to 'sist on your takin' dat money. Lor, I dunno how Pratt City would a' done widout Boyd's restaurant. My lil' gal's cookin' cert'nly kep' de heart in more'n one nigger. Chile, de woman dat gives a man a good meal what his 'gestive powers can work on plumb straight, is layin' de under foundation for all de work dat man's gwine do. She sho' is. De nigger race want de under foundation kep' right, same as de white race. Lor, honey, de nigger race want eberything. I'se beginnin' to see dat po' boy Gloss was powerful nearer right dan I eber knowed when he wanted to larn at dat Tuskadela. Dat school teach de nigger to lay all de under foundation right. It turn out men and women what can do de work, not for de white man only, but for de nigger too. We nigger people thinks too much 'bout de white man, honey. Dar lots of work to do for de niggers, and de nigger can do it. Lor, de nigger want nice houses, and good clothes, and well-cooked victuals, same as de white man. De nigger can employ de nigger, if all of 'em set to work good. I'se seein' things diff'rent ebery day, honey, since I comed to dis go afront town o' Pratt City."

Uncle Pete's "lil' gal" was looking into his face with a smile on her own. Her hand rested upon the table, where a pile of money formed the text for Uncle Pete's discourse.

"The hundred dollars *has* increased amazingly," she said. "And I know whose work brought a large part of it."

"Why, cert'nly. You'se worked for it good and hon-

est," said the old man, with a twinkle in his eye. "Now go and spend it jes' as honest, honey. De man or de woman what makes dere money honest, and spends it honest, is sho' doin' double good in de world. Dar's de good of de makin', and de good of de spendin'. You sho' can't do no better wid dem hunderds dan to go buy dat lil' plantation, and git Free a-breathin' de pure air and a-workin' in de sweet-smellin' breath o' de ploughed earth. Dat mine's done tuk too much life out o' him, honey. He ain't gwine git real stout stayin' in Pratt City."

A look of anxiety came to Magnolia's face. It was not new to her, this fear which Uncle Pete had put into words.

"He is not gaining as he should do," she said. "So far as the injuries are concerned, he is well. And yet—he is certainly not strong."

"Honey, you jes' take dat boy 'way from here," said Uncle Pete, earnestly. "He too near dat prison-house to forgit. He sho' doin' a mighty good work 'mong dey niggers what's served dey time in de mines. Dey'll cert'nly miss him sore. But, honey, he need to start a new life. He need to do some livin' for himself. It powerful good to live for oders, honey, but de man what do dat, and done got clean past de livin' for himself, is like to find de flesh fail. Dat boy want to live a out-of-de-house life. He want to git interested in de growin' of de corn and de cotton. He want to earn money and make a fresh life for himself. He git de fire in his eyes agin den, and de spring in his legs."

Magnolia sighed. That sharp fear, which had come to her before Free's accident, had never left her. He was to all appearance the Free Stanlin of the old days now, except in the matter of strength. In this respect he had never recovered the ground lost in the mine. Every trace of his accident had disappeared, but the languor remained.

There had recently come from Cleve Boynton a letter urging his friend and hero to leave Pratt City and come to the village where the boy had found work for the summer. He was doing well, and was enthusiastic over a little plantation that was for sale. It would just suit Free, he declared, and he could work it for one year and see how he liked it before buying. The boy was so much in earnest that he added in his own handwriting a postscript to the words of the scribe who had written the letter for him. That postscript was a source of much conjecture, "du kum" being the only words legible. They were written straight from the young negro's heart.

Magnolia was tempted to try the experiment. The change might be just the thing Free needed to restore his strength. Uncle Pete was urgent.

"You jes' try it, honey," he said.

"We shall be risking money that you have earned," Magnolia replied, but she said it with a smile. She knew how much weight such an argument would have with the old man.

"Lor, honey, I more'n got my share in Boyd's restaurant," he replied. "Dat eatin' place a gold mine. It sho'ly am, if it worked right. Uncle Pete stay and work it. Den dar no risk. You and dat boy go and git in de cotton and de corn. Den when you well 'stablished, Uncle Pete he come and 'sist on dat plantation. But dis year he stay at de restaurant. Now you think mighty carefully 'bout it, honey."

In the end Uncle Pete won. It weighed greatly with Free that success, even a measure of it, upon a plantation, would put it in his power to make a home for his father and mother. West Stanlin had never recovered the complete use of his lower limbs. He could walk—slowly and with the aid of crutches—but it was upon Betsey that the work of the little farm devolved. Again, as in her younger days, she ploughed, and planted, and hoed, brave of heart as ever.

"Don't you worry, chile," she wrote. "Me and West ain't takin' harm."

But it was the thought that he could have his father and mother with him that weighed more than anything else with Free. He could not bear to think of Betsey walking behind a plough.

"I'm doing no good here. I've a great mind to go," he said.

And they went.

The southbound train rattled along fitfully, making many stops. People walked in and out of the negro car and stared at the passengers. Nobody went in or out without noticing the pair who sat nearest the door. It was the strong contrast between them that drew every one's attention. Both were handsome. The delicate, white face of the woman was not more clearly cut than the dark features of the man by her side. Nobody could pass Magnolia without notice. The sorrow that had robbed her face of some of its young brightness, had given to it a refinement that more than compensated for the loss. If there had been little suggestion of negro blood in the days of her early girlhood, there was less now. In appearance, and bearing, and speech, she was a white woman, and a white woman of the better class.

Free, on the other hand, was dark enough to be almost black. Tall and well moulded, he had none of the clumsiness of form so often associated with the negro. He was a fine specimen of manhood, handsome in face and supple in figure. But the colour of his skin was in strong contrast with the fairness of the girl by his side.

That contrast must have affected unpleasantly some of the white men who lounged through the negro car, for two or three of them stared insolently at Free and Magnolia, and spoke some low, angry words to each other. They left the car, and presently returned, their numbers increased in the meantime. Free noticed their peculiar behaviour, and failed to account for it. The

young husband and wife were nearing their destination. The thought afforded Free satisfaction. He did not like the look of the men who for the third time thrust angry faces in at the door of the carriage. There were but two more stopping places—the first a small country town—before the journey would be ended.

The train made a stay of over ten minutes at the little town, long enough to allow half the men who had been standing on the platform of the negro car to leave the station and return. Some twelve or fourteen more came with them, and Free noticed that many of them carried guns. An uncomfortable misgiving seized upon him. It was so fully manifest that the attention of the men was directed toward himself and Magnolia, that he began to fear they had mistaken him for some law-breaker on whom they were preparing to execute vengeance. Lynchings were not of uncommon occurrence in these parts. The bearing of the men was sufficiently threatening to awaken unpleasant sensations.

He was not left long in doubt of their intentions. The train was not more than fairly under way when the men came inside the negro car and grouped themselves about the back and end of the seat on which he was sitting. For a moment he hesitated, and then turned to them with the question: "What do you want here?"

"We'll shew you what we want," replied one of the men threateningly.

"Look here," said Free quietly, "you fellows are on the wrong track. I've come straight from Birmingham to-day. I have not been in these parts before. If you want anybody, it must be some other man you're after."

One of the group laughed mockingly. Magnolia turned to him with indignation, and half rose. He laid his hand on her shoulder and forced her back.

"You sit down," he said roughly.

This indignity to Magnolia was too much for Free. He sprang to his feet.

"Take your hands off her," he said. "She is my wife."

Before the words were out of his mouth, a white man struck him a blow in the face that almost stunned him.

"You lying nigger!" retorted the aggressor. "You dare to consort with a white woman, and try to tell us she's your wife. Do you think we are fools? The law of this State acknowledges no such alliance as that, and you may trust us to see that you niggers don't set our laws at defiance. We know how to deal with such as you."

"I am not a white woman. I am a negro. You will find yourselves called upon to answer for this assault."

Magnolia's voice, clear and penetrating, rang out in indignant protest. It was answered by a grip on her shoulder that she felt to the bone.

"You hold your tongue, you hussy! We'll teach the pair of you to go about in this shameless fashion. White women and niggers ain't going to have no relations with each other in our State."

It takes some self-restraint for a man to stand still when his wife is roughly handled. Free's brain was on fire. He would have felled these men to the ground if he could have met them in fair fight, but his arms were pinioned. He tried reasoning, forcing his voice to calmness.

"Let me understand what you accuse me of," he said. "You commit this assault because I am travelling with my wife?"

The men answered him with a harsh, discordant laugh of mockery.

"It's no go, darky," said one of them. "The law don't call a white woman the wife of a black man in this State. It has another name for her. A nigger isn't going to brazen it out with a white girl of her stamp here, not while there are plenty of branches on the trees."

"I tell you I am not a white woman," said Magnolia.

"You're too white for us," was the reply.

"Very well," said Free, quietly. "But at any rate let my wife go. You've nothing to say to her. If you want to string me up, I suppose you'll do it, but you're less than men if you lay hands on a woman."

Another blow in the face from a clenched fist was the only answer.

It was a pitiable and disgraceful scene—on the one side those angry, prejudice-driven white men, whose sanity on this particular point could hardly have been guaranteed by any expert in the country, on the other the young husband and wife, hustled, threatened, brutally used, and powerless in the hands of their captors. Such pictures are not pleasant to dwell upon. It was a sudden, horrible outburst of rage, a merciless abuse of the power of numbers. It was one of those scenes that the world has shuddered over too often, a humiliating revelation of the demon that lies hidden in men.

The train slowed up; the men dragged their prisoners from the car. Then there was the quick rush through the little deserted station, and the hurrying of the captives along the country road. What need to tell it—the inhumanity of man when passion-stirred? A woman with clothing torn from her back, lashed and bleeding, driven into the swamp, pursued by men who shouted and taunted and struck at her, always preventing her from turning back to the spot where her husband, by the short, uncompromising directness of that lawlessness which men call mob law, was strung up to the stout limb of a tree. She heard shots fired, and she turned and fought like a tigress with her captors. And then everything—the shouts of the men, and the cruel swish of their tough, stout switches—was drowned in a burst of artillery that seemed heaven's own protest against the tragedy that was being enacted here in this forest.

It was such a storm as had not been seen in those parts for years. The blackness had been gathering for many minutes; at the present time it overspread the

swamp. Now and again it was rent asunder by a light lurid and vengeful. One such eye-blinding shaft struck a big oak in the track of the fighting, shouting group, and brought it down at the right moment to stretch a man out upon the ground.

"See here, I've had enough of this," exclaimed one of the party. Let's get out. That nigger's about riddled by this time. Let her go where she's a mind, the shameless hussy!"

They struck at her savagely as they turned to help their companion to his feet. The wind was rushing through the swamp like a tornado. The rain fell in torrents. The men were glad to get out of that desolate, treacherous region. They had wreaked their vengeance on this woman whose whiteness of skin made it a crime for her to be seen with a black man. Now they left her to the mercy of the storm, to find her way out of the swamp, or to wander hopeless in it, according as fortune or heaven favoured her.

And the young wife, bleeding, staggering, bewildered by the tumult of the storm and the tumult of fear, looked up into the cleft blackness and wondered why those fiery flashes did not strike straight to the life centres of men who had forgotten manhood, and to whom justice and mercy appealed equally in vain.

She was lost in the swamp. She did not know which way to turn to get back to the spot where they had separated her from Free. A passion of fear and horror raged within her. That old question that is as old as oppression and cruelty, beat like a hammer upon her brain. Why was heaven patient while the helpless suffered? Why did not swift vengeance overtake the cruel? Why must the innocent cringe and fear, and the oppressor stalk rampantly through the land?

She was maddened with terror. What had they done to Free? Her own pain was forgotten in fear for him.

Why did this horrible swamp shut her in so that she could not get back to him? She had heard shots, but that must be a long time ago. Every moment seemed a lifetime while she fought her way through the tangle and the treacherous bog, seeking always a way of escape that she might go to her husband.

The storm raged on. The rain came down in sheets. It seemed as if heaven hid its face from the tragedy being enacted on the outskirts of that swamp. It was heart-sickening enough, and yet of late there have been worse. There was the tightening cord, the rough handling, the swinging, quivering body made a target for bullets. But there was no deliberate attempt at torture, none of the more fiendish developments of mob violence that have made the world shudder. It was in no way distinguished from hundreds of other lynchings, in which a group, or perchance a mob of men, constituted themselves the arbiters of life or death to a fellow mortal, and shewed him none of the mercy that they, in common with all weak humanity, would one day sorely need.

The thick darkness of the storm came down upon the scene. The thunder burst upon the men whose vaunted love of purity was their excuse for the breaking of one of the highest of heaven's laws. There were some among the actors in that tragedy who would be long before they forgot to-day's storm. There came a moment when a flash and a roar were almost simultaneous, and when for a space the world seemed ablaze. When dazzled eyes recovered sufficiently to take account of the surroundings, two men were seen lying upon the ground beneath a tree that had a deep black furrow torn from its crown sheer down the trunk to the earth. The sight was not one to have a tranquillizing effect upon the nerves.

"I guess this piece of business is about played out," said one of the bystanders hastily. "This place ain't the pleasantest place in the world just now. I reckon they

ain't dead, but we've got to get them where they can have attention. As for the nigger, I'll answer for it he won't break no more laws."

He turned and fired another shot at the figure hanging, a ghastly spectacle, in the horror and darkness of the storm. Here in the forest the blackness seemed every moment to grow deeper. An impulse to seek the open land possessed the men. They stooped and raised their companions, and made all haste to leave this unhallowed spot. Their exit from the wood was hardly less hurried than their entrance had been.

The two parties met some distance from the scene of the crime and compared notes.

"Well, have you finished the nigger?" demanded the swamp half of the squad.

"You bet," was the answer. "Where's the woman?"

"Up to her neck in water by this time, I hope," was the brutal reply. "We drove her where the mud's about as treacherous as a nigger, and that isn't saying a little."

Their hopes were not well founded, for while the storm yet raged furiously, Magnolia's feet disentangled themselves from the trap into which they had been driven, and led her to higher land.

Where was Free? Was she far from, or near the spot where they separated her from him? They had driven her hither and thither. She was hopelessly lost. Should she ever find him? She listened for the sound of voices, but all was still. Then the agony of sorrow and fear found vent.

"He is dead!" she sobbed, and with a cry of despair rushed on.

"Hush-sh! Don't make a noise. We ain't wantin' them to come back. You-all come and help. I'm bringin' him to."

The words came in a weird whisper from a clump of bushes. Magnolia did not stay to ask how Cleve Boynton came there. With one wild, hushed sob she flung

herself down upon the soaked ground and bent over him —her husband—her Free, whom they had murdered.

Cleve had removed the rope from his neck, and was staunching the blood that flowed from his wounds.

"He ain't dead," said the boy piteously, peering into Magnolia's face. "Don't you go to sayin' he's dead. We're a-goin' to bring him round yit."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Yes, it's a pretty little study. I have nowhere about the place a more promising thing done by an unknown worker. The artist is decidedly a genius. An invalid, poor fellow."

The Birmingham dealer in works of art leaned over the counter as he spoke, and looked down at the little picture. It was undoubtedly above the average, though it was simple enough—nothing but a peach orchard in bloom, and a girl standing among the trees, with head held high and eyes fixed on the far distance. The artist had touched the girl's face lovingly. There was a suggestion of sadness about the fair young beauty, but the faintly suggested sorrow did not detract from the brilliancy of the face. The peach blossoms and the young girl stood out with a warm glow from the canvas, both pertaining to the spring-time of life.

"You have another here by the same hand, I see," remarked the customer, turning over the dealer's collection. "If I'm not mistaken, that's the same face, though the change in it is marvellous."

The wintry bareness of one giant tree almost filled the canvas he held. But the eye did not seek the tree, except as a background for the figure of a girl, who stood with hands hanging by her sides in the lassitude of a great and hopeless sorrow. There was passion in the face, and yearning, but that which drew and held the eye was its infinite sadness. Winter had entered the girl's soul, as it had torn off the soft drapery from the tree behind her.

"Yes," replied the picture dealer carelessly, "it is the same face. I do not wonder he paints it. It has rare

capabilities. The artist's wife is his model. She is really a beautiful woman. He has others. He is especially happy in his darky pictures, but in my opinion he is never at his best unless that face figures in some part of his work."

"Here is a third," remarked the hunter for art treasures, picking up a sketch of a girl standing beneath a magnolia tree, one flower of which was just bursting into bloom. "The same face again."

"Ah, now you have come to one of his best," replied the dealer. "That picture has attracted no little attention in art circles. I have re-ordered it fully half a dozen times. The original is, I believe, in the artist's own possession. For some reason or other he refuses to part with it."

The customer chose the last picture, paid a good price for it, and went out, wondering whom the F. S. in the corner might represent. He was enough of a connoisseur to know that this was not common work. He predicted success for the artist in later years, when his art should be perfected, and the genius which now made itself felt in spite of faults of execution should be freed from such trammels.

The picture dealer smiled as he swept the proceeds of the picture from the counter and reflected how large a proportion of the sum represented his own profit. He smiled again a few minutes later, when the door opened and a woman entered, carrying a portfolio under her arm. The two smiles were of different character. This last had more than a little patronage in it, and just enough cordiality to intimate to the visitor that she was welcome. The owner of the shop came forward rubbing his hands.

"Ah, good day, Mrs. Stanlin. You have brought me some more of your husband's pictures, I see. The others are not all disposed of yet, but we will look at them. Oh, yes, by all means let me see them."

The last words were spoken in answer to an involun-

tary movement on the part of the visitor, a drawing back, as if she would keep the portfolio in her own possession. The suggested withdrawal was not pleasing to the shopkeeper.

In truth, this Birmingham dealer in art goods did not care how often the invalid artist, whom he had never seen, sent those attractive little studies to him. They sold, and sold well, and he did not have to pay a high price for them.

There was a certain self-repression about the woman who opened the portfolio; but with all her safe-guarding of her secret she could not entirely hide her hunger for the word or two of praise that fell from the dealer's lips. It was not to be wondered at that the words were precious, coming from one who stood to the artist in the place of a public. Let a man love his art ever so well, he still finds an unsatisfied craving until the thing of beauty which he has created shall appeal to other eyes than his own, until the work into which he has put some of his soul shall touch the soul of another. Very bare and meagre, very carefully guarded, was the praise measured out by this seller of pictures, who was a go-between for the people and the invalid artist who had no means of knowing his public. He was careful to satisfy just enough of the hunger for appreciation to make it likely that those little paintings, which were a long way ahead of the large majority he was buying, should continue to come his way. He very affably paid over the price agreed upon for some three or four sold since the last visit, and added the new sketches to his stock with genuine satisfaction.

And the artist's wife, with a smile on her lips, but the hunger in her heart not half-satisfied, hurried back to Pratt City, where a certain restaurant, well known to coloured men, was found to be a better paying occupation than art, even when the art was moderately successful.

The little home to which she hastened was unpreten-

tious enough, but it was as far from vulgarity as from wealth. If it had been a hovel, however, she would have gone back to it with hardly less gladness; for Free was there—yet.

"Don't hurry like that, chile. You'll be that sore done out you won't hev a mite o' strength left. There ain't nothin' takin' harm. I jest come over from seein' that everything's plumb ready for you to do the last cookin' for supper. There ain't no need for hastenin' above measure."

Betsey Stanlin's motherly face appeared in the little hall as she spoke, and Betsey's hand was laid upon the young wife's arm.

"Where is Free?"

Magnolia had glanced into the room on her left hand and failed to see the figure she sought.

"West's persuaded him it was goin' to do him a sight o' good to take a turn in the yard. I reckon he was wearyin' for you."

Before Betsey had finished speaking a door opened. An old pair of eyes and a young pair turned eagerly toward it. Neither of these women could forget that the face for which they looked would not long gladden them by its presence. The eyes of both were wistful, but from the wife's the sadness was immediately driven away by sheer force of will. Ever since Magnolia and the boy, Cleve Boynton, had fought for the life that a mob of white men had almost stolen, her one thought had been the bringing into that life of every crumb of comfort and cheer she could find. She understood, as did Betsey, that it was snatched back only for a season. But her smile was never wanting when her husband's eyes were fixed upon her.

"I am afraid they are going to drive you to work too hard, those picture buyers," she said gaily. "They've taken four away since I was there last, and Mr. Blanshard says I can bring him all you like to send."

She made the most of every word of praise, when it came to the telling. She saw the warmth come into his face, and the light to his eye. He smiled down at her.

"My work is nowhere by the side of yours in the way of profit," he said. "But it all helps. And at any rate it makes me feel that I am not quite useless."

"Useless!"

She looked up into his face with eyes more eloquent than any words could have been. He put his arm round her and drew her to him. Neither spoke, but both were thinking of the reason why such moments must be to them especially precious. Both were thinking of the end.

No one who had seen the Free Stanlin of past days could have helped the feeling of shock at the change that a few minutes of wild passion on the part of others had wrought. The face was handsome as ever, but the figure that had been so supple and athletic showed a pitiable lack of strength. The hand that clasped Magnolia's trembled. Many a time it was forced to lay down the brush before the soul of the artist was satisfied. The hands had grown painfully thin and transparent, but their perseverance never failed them. The man who had taken up a ruined life, down there in the mine, and made of it something that no subsequent outrage could rob of its grandeur, had not turned coward at the weakness that had come as a result of the mistake (?) made by a company of white men. He understood that he would carry to his grave the burden of disease brought on by those bullet wounds. He understood, also, that the carrying would not last long. And because life was for him short and wanting in vigour, he took it up the more bravely, intent on making out of these last months the best record they were capable of accomplishing. Before he was able to sit up in bed, his work among the discharged prisoners was resumed. Rough negro convicts though they were,

these men were silent with admiration when they saw him forget his own pain in planning for their future.

"He's sho' got no give in inside o' him," declared one of them to Magnolia when he was out of Free's hearing. "He'll be a-plannin' and a-doin' somethin' for somebody when he's laid in his coffin. He cert'nly will."

A year had elapsed since Magnolia came back to Pratt City with what looked like the lifeless body of the young man who had gone away hopefully only the day before.

"I'se gwine right off, honey, to fetch that boy's mother," said Uncle Pete positively. "Don't you fear, honey. Dat chile gwine get better a heap sooner if his mammy come to 'tend him."

And thus it happened that the wife and the mother fought out together that battle for a life that ended in a temporary victory. Both knew it was but temporary.

Never afterward did Magnolia dare to dwell on that night when Cleve Boynton and the men of his own race whom he had summoned to his aid carried through the darkness the "nigger" whom the white men had left for dead. Through swamps and woods and along unfrequented roads she followed until they came out to the railroad many miles nearer Birmingham than the station at which the prisoners had been hurried out. Clothed in borrowed garments, Magnolia, for the first time in her life, rode in the carriage set apart for white people.

"You sho' better not be seed with him," said Cleve Boynton warily. "We-uns is goin' to take good keer of him, and if they-uns tries to stop us, sho' we ain't goin' to give in without a fight. But you-uns better ride 'mong the white people. It's safer—for him. He ain't dead, and he ain't aimin' to die. Don't you go to thinking he is."

It was over now, and he was given back to her—for a time. But she did not let herself think of that night. Like Free himself, she was intent on making the most of the life that remained to him.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"Come here, Esther child, and sit down in your old place. You have done nothing but wander round the house since you came into it."

Mrs. Ross sat in her big chair by the long window. The little, clear-voiced lady was as imperious as ever.

A smile came to Esther's lips as she drew the footstool forward.

"You forget that coming here is a treat to me, and that I want to see everything," she said.

The elder lady's hand dropped lightly upon the arm of the speaker.

"Child, what sort of a treat do you think it is to me when I get my daughter back for a few hours?" she asked. "I think if I had known how complete a theft it was to be, I would not have allowed Franklin to steal her away from me."

She leaned forward as she spoke, ostensibly to pick from her skirt a shred of cotton. As she made the movement her quick eyes for a moment scanned the girl's face. Did she think she might find regret there?

"You have not the choice to make over again," said Esther gaily. "If you had, you would make it the same as before—as I should."

Perhaps she had divined the purpose of that short, searching glance. Certainly the thought to which Mrs. Ross had given no verbal utterance was answered by the half laughing assertion. There was a subtle sympathy between mother and daughter that often rendered words unnecessary. That same sympathy made it not quite easy for either to hide her thoughts from the other. It may have been for this reason that Esther's home visits had been growing fewer.

It had of late somewhat troubled the little lady who ruled over the Ross house that she had given her daughter to Franklin Heathcote. She had blamed him severely for his want of caution in leaving so large a sum of money in the house when he himself was called away, but, like all the rest of the world, she was constrained to forgive him when he frankly owned himself in the wrong, and deplored the sorrow his carelessness had brought upon Esther. It was hard to be angry with him long, yet it tried her patience to see Esther economize to the extent of dispensing with everything that was not an absolute necessity. The Kentucky horses were sold to the highest bidder, and Esther walked backward and forward between the new and the old home. She took the altered circumstances bravely, and neither by word nor look added to her husband's regret the pain of thinking her unhappy. But to the eyes that were the keenest to read her face, there was a yearning unrest upon it, together with a proud guarding of its secrets that did not give place even when she was back in her childhood's home. Nay, possibly the secrets were more carefully guarded there than elsewhere.

Had it been any other than Franklin Heathcote who had brought himself and Esther into difficulty, the elder lady would have been a severe critic. Like everybody else, however, she was inclined to look leniently upon the failings of the young man whose handsome face and winning manner made it far from easy to blame him harshly, or to associate anything worse than a little recklessness with his mistakes and failures.

Nobody had felt disposed to be hard upon him when the news of his loss became public. Sympathy was more general than blame. It is true there were many wise remarks made about the danger of carelessness in money matters, and the folly of leaving things to take care of themselves, but Marie Renshaw was not far wrong when she averred that Franklin Heathcote had enough friends

to stand by him in an emergency. They rallied to his aid to such good purpose that there was never any talk other than of giving him time to pay off the money that had been stolen. When a couple of well-to-do planters manifested their faith in him by volunteering to give security for the two thousand dollars, Franklin pledging himself to pay within three years, nobody was dissatisfied with the arrangement. That is to say, nobody but one young man. In those days Ted Renshaw did more than a little arguing on the other side of the question. Ostensibly he was a warm advocate of his *friend* Franklin Heathcote. His praises were broad enough to be fulsome, but they invariably left a sting behind them. After a conversation with him men went away with a feeling of chill, a lessening of that happy certainty of the integrity of the young tax collector that they had enjoyed before. When Franklin's first year's payment was made promptly, Ted professed to be very much relieved. He declared that a burden had been lifted from his mind. But when in the second year cotton proved to be a poor crop, and Franklin, who had put in more cotton than ever before, lagged more than half way behind in his payments, young Renshaw did not look heartbroken. He adroitly called attention to the fact that a man who before the loss of two thousand dollars could not live within his income could hardly be expected, unless in an exceptionally good year, to make nearly seven hundred dollars over and above his expenses. Possibly the logic of his remark appealed to some of the more cautious men of the neighbourhood, for there began to be manifest an undercurrent of disapproval as time went on and the second payment was still unmet. The third year was now drawing to a close. Speculation was rife as to whether the expiration of the time of grace would see the debt cleared off.

"Have you heard anything more of Betsey Stanlin?"

For several minutes mother and daughter had sat silent.

Esther's eyes came back from their survey of the distant landscape.

"No," she said. "I have had but one letter since she went away."

The sigh which followed the words was hardly audible, yet it reached the ear of Mrs. Ross.

"You are foolish to worry yourself about that affair, child," she said. "Some day you will find that you have vexed yourself for nothing. I have much sympathy for Betsey. I believe she is an honest woman, but the evidence was so strong against Free that I cannot but think he knows more about the missing money than anybody else does."

Esther turned sharply.

"I would sooner suspect myself—or Franklin," she said hotly.

"My dear, you will never know a nigger," replied Mrs. Ross calmly. "You believe that young man innocent because he says he is so, as if, forsooth, the word of a nigger was worth a straw."

"It would take a great deal to persuade me that the word of Free Stanlin was not worth as much as my own," said Esther, but this time the heat had departed from her tone. "There was no evidence against him. Do you think anybody would suspect Franklin of theft if he happened to walk into a neighbour's conservatory rather late at night?"

"My dear, the comparison is absurd. Franklin is not a nigger, but an honourable gentleman," replied Mrs. Ross. "The word of a gentleman would be sufficient in such a case. But a darky is a darky. He is treacherous by nature. I am not sure he can help it. It is born in him."

"Franklin is as fully convinced of Free Stanlin's innocence as I am," said Esther quietly.

"Yes, I know. You are both deluded young people," returned Mrs. Ross serenely. "You have suffered enough from this robbery to teach you better. But it takes the young long to learn. The way Franklin has run after that family since the trial is to me unaccountable. Before the robbery he fully agreed with me that West Stanlin was forgetting his proper position as a negro. But since the young man's conviction, I really think he has been worse than you. I had no idea he was so ridiculously soft-hearted."

Esther's face softened.

"Yes, he has gone out of his way to shew them kindness," she said. "His change of attitude has been very pleasing to me."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," replied Mrs. Ross, with a half laugh. "Even his Quixotic behaviour in undertaking to look after that little holding of West's meets with your approval, necessarily. Well, you are two silly children, but of course you think yourselves wiser than your elders."

Esther's face was grave as she walked back to her own home that afternoon. She took herself to task for the heaviness of her heart, and told herself that instead of this sadness she ought to be rejoicing that the cloud which had seemed so hopelessly heavy at the time of the robbery had partially lifted. Half the money was paid, and if the remainder could not all be met at the stipulated time, the worst that could happen would be the loss of the plantation. That would clear off all stain from the name of Franklin Heathcote. The fear that had chilled her very soul on the night of the robbery was absent to-day. Esther had come to love her home very dearly, but she loved Franklin's honour more. While that was safe the worst had not to be met.

Yet the old pain remained. The perfect understanding she had hoped to establish between herself and Franklin with reference to monetary affairs had not be-

come an established fact. He had explained some of his difficulties to her, but when she sought to share all his burdens he lovingly refused to go into details.

"It is perhaps a weakness on my part, dear," he said, "but I can never bear to feel that the women of my home are troubling their heads over each little particular of my management. I own I have been a little extravagant, but there is nothing serious about the difficulties except the raising of this stolen money, and that I shall do yet. I promise to be most exemplary in the future, and you shall economize to your heart's content, but you shall not worry over every bill that comes due, and vex your soul at every failure to make one dollar do the work of two."

His words did not deceive her. She knew that there was a part of his life from which she was shut out. She did not urge him further. Something within her restrained. Gradually she had come to feel that his standard of life was not identical with her own. She had begun by looking for the perfect in him. She never looked for it now, but her love toward him had grown more tender as it became less proud.

He was not the light-hearted Franklin Heathcote who had shaken off care and refused to believe in disaster in the first days of their marriage. Since Free Stanlin's conviction his carelessness and gaiety had left him. Men said he took his loss very much to heart. Esther believed that the loss of Free's liberty was the greater blow to him. Like his wife, he seemed to feel in a measure responsible for it. She scarcely understood his attitude herself. To everybody else it was a profound mystery.

He had aged much in the last three years. His love of pleasure seemed to have left him, or to have become subservient to an unquenchable desire for work. If his plantation did not yield to the utmost limit of its capabilities, it was not Franklin Heathcote's fault. He

looked happier when fully occupied with directing the men in his fields than at any other time.

His love for his wife was the only thing that had suffered no change, or, rather, the change was simply in degree. Esther was dearer to him to-day than she had ever been before. He was always studying how to add to her happiness, and he had grown almost morbidly anxious for her approval. And yet he hid his heart from her, though he knew that by so doing he gave her pain.

She did not guess that he was as lonely as she was over this exclusion; that he longed for the free, full communion of heart of those first days before the debts began to press heavily. He would have given everything he possessed to be able to take her in his arms and feel that there was no barrier between them, to look again into her eyes with that long, deep gaze that had nothing to fear and nothing to hide. But it could not be. It never could be again.

He was longing for it intensely this afternoon. He saw nothing of the beauty of the earth, or the clear blueness of the sky, as he strode across the fields at a pace that betokened either haste or extreme absorption of mind. He was not looking at the outside world, but at a man's folly and its consequences.

"I'd give my soul to be able to live the last five years of my life over again."

He put up his hand to brush away the moisture from his forehead.

"What a fool a man can be without ever realizing his folly."

His thoughts had gone on working out some train of reasoning, while his feet had traversed the length of a field.

"If I'd only been wise enough to face it, back there at the first, and let them do their worst! Is there no limit to the price a man has to pay for a false step?"

He lifted his head impatiently, and his thoughts went

on with a persistence that no outward influence could turn aside.

"Rawlins would have come down on me, and set the rest off. What then? It would have been heaven to this."

He leaped a fence and started across another field. He was thinking of a night, long ago, when he sent off a cheque that must be met with money not his own. It had seemed then a thing only a little risky. It looked like a crime to-day.

And the one false step had led to another. And now the steps were too many to be retraced, for a trail of ruin lay along them.

"How was I to guess the fellow would spoil the whole thing by hanging round on that night, of all others? If he had kept away, it would have gone through without a hitch, and nobody would have been the loser."

He strode on more impatiently than before. What was the use arguing? He had argued it out from the first step to the last fully a thousand times before this, and never once arrived at that satisfactory conclusion that would remove the gnawing from his heart and convince him that subsequent events were independent of certain acts of his own.

He was going on to West Stanlin's little farm. The place was well looked after now that he had taken it in hand. West lost nothing by not being on the spot. His interests were most carefully guarded.

Often as he went there, Franklin Heathcote never crossed West Stanlin's place without the whole scene of the trial coming back to him like a picture of evil. The old planter's face, Betsey's wistful eyes, the young negro in the prisoner's dock—they stood out before him as on the day he saw them, and drove him again and again over the old useless arguments.

Why must a man be responsible for the miscarriage of his carefully laid schemes? Why, when he had

planned that which in his dream was to have been a harmless fraud, should a tragedy rise like a spectre from the heart of his project, and spread ruin where happiness had been?

"It ought to have succeeded—it *did* succeed, save in one particular. There was no apparent danger in that direction. One more crime laid to the charge of the darkies would not have broken the back of the negro race. It is a broad back for the bearing of such burdens. On the face of it the scheme was about as safe as any that man could devise. And he must upset it all, and get himself in for the whole thing, by being in that conservatory. How was I to know he was such a crazy, moon-struck fool as to be wandering about at dead of night?"

Franklin Heathcote stood with his hand upon the last fence. The little cabin where West and Betsey had taken shelter was before him. He did not heed it. He was looking back at a night when he took a dangerous step to escape the consequences of a yet earlier error.

"I could have paid it back—I *am* paying it back. It was not a pleasant alternative, to borrow the rest of that two thousand dollars of public money, but it was better than being a defaulter." He winced at the thought, but went on with the argument. "It hid all past deficiencies under the one great loss. And they were not unwilling to wait. I was sure they would not be. It went just as I expected, and there was no real risk in it for them, for as long as I live I will know no rest till the money is paid. It saved her from disgrace. It might all have turned out right—the old happiness might all have come back—but for Free Stanlin's stupidity. It never will now.

He pushed his hat from his forehead. The pain of a wearing sorrow had settled upon his face. It was no use arguing, no use going over and over the past. It could not be undone; and if by any process of reasoning he could logically prove that the way of that past had been the best and most perfectly defensible way, his heart

would give the lie to the logic. Best! when it had shut Esther away from him by a wall of his own raising, and made the thought of Betsey and West Stanlin a whip that never ceased scourging: when it had taken from his heart the pride of manhood, and forced him to live upon excuses and apologies that needed renewing every day.

He climbed the fence, transacted his business in stern fashion with the negro who rented West Stanlin's farm, and returned to his own house. When he met Esther it was with the same tender smile that was always upon his lips for her. While he was with her he hid the gnawing pain, forced it down to a subordinate place, and let his love for her and his joy in her presence soothe the ache. And yet it was when he was with her that the wound was the sorest. It was then that he felt most keenly the loss of his own manhood, and yearned after the higher things that could never be his.

There was another source of anxiety, or rather another phase of the same trouble, that was causing him much disquietude just now. He was not ready to meet the payment of a thousand dollars almost due. His bondsmen were getting impatient. Possibly Ted Renshaw's repeated suggestions had been working, or it may have been that time had worn away a little of the zest of friendship. The two men who had come to Franklin's aid had been asking some searching questions of late, and Franklin had found it not quite easy to satisfy them. They had pressed him hard, and he had ended by promising to have the money ready at the stipulated time. That time was approaching, and seven hundred dollars was yet lacking. The plantation was mortgaged to the last dollar that could be borrowed upon it. It was the difficulty of three years ago, but in a less dangerous form. It was not now public money that was missing—used to pay private debts. The case to-day was simpler. If the money were not forthcoming, his bondsmen would be called upon to make good the deficiency. And then—

well, one of them had hinted that Franklin Heathcote's house was saleable, and might fetch more than it was mortgaged for.

The old fear that had made Franklin Heathcote take the first false step and use the tax money to pay his private debts was at work afresh. He had told himself hundreds of times that if the test were to come over again he would let the house go. Yes, and so he would, if it would save his honour, and bring him back the old peace of mind. But these were gone forever. It was a pity that the house and plantation should go too—after all he had sacrificed for them. He thought of Esther, and grew heartsick. He had not become the man she wanted him to be. He was disappointing her every day, and he knew it, but he had at least saved her from poverty. He had little to fall back upon when the plantation was gone. The position he had filled before his uncle's death had been taken by another. It had been barely enough to keep one. It could never have kept two, when one of the two was Esther.

He had gained nothing by these years of duplicity but one thing—house and plantation were still his own. And in time he could pay off this debt. It was once more the old question of gaining time. But how?

Strange that it should be a half-laughing, half-sneering suggestion of Ted Renshaw's that set his thoughts working in a new direction. Ted still kept up a show of friendliness, though he was seldom to be seen now at the young planter's house.

"Getting near the critical time for you, isn't it?" he asked with apparent solicitude, when he chanced to meet Franklin on the highway. "How the mischief anybody thinks you can pay a thousand dollars out of one year's income beats me."

"Oh, I don't know," began Franklin, but Ted interrupted him with a sneering laugh.

"You'll have to turn public sympathy round your way again, somehow," he said. "There's nothing like it to gain an extension of time. Even another robbery would be a godsend to you just now. Anything is easier than trying to drag a thousand dollars in one year out of a plantation like yours."

He went off with the laugh on his lips, leaving Franklin staring after him angrily. Why didn't the fellow mind his own business? *He* was not going to be the loser, no matter which way it turned out.

Those half-sneering words rankled in Franklin's mind. He began to taste the bitterness of the coming downfall. He felt the exultation hidden beneath Ted Renshaw's expressions of commiseration, and it maddened him.

"They *must* give me time," he said desperately.

But even as he spoke his heart sank. His bondsmen were obdurate. And the county—well, hope *might* yet lie in that direction. He had still many friends left.

It was then that Ted's last taunt came to the front. Arouse public sympathy? Could it be done it might gain for him time. Public feeling counted for much. That sneering allusion to the robbery had at the moment appeared simply an insult. By degrees it proved suggestive.

The hot drops gathered on Franklin Heathcote's forehead. He was following out the thought Ted's words had started. Would it avail—to repeat the ruse that had succeeded before? Involuntarily his steps quickened. It may have been that the haste was indicative of impatience at the sudden temptation; it may have been that it was the eagerness of a newly born hope?

The gleaming glass of Esther's conservatory presently came in view. As it caught his eye Franklin raised his head, stared at it blankly for a moment, and then straightened himself to his full height. With the movement the reaction came. In a sudden outburst of anger

he hurled from him the suggestion that all the homeward way had set his brain on fire. It was madness, and he was a fool to entertain it.

And yet—and yet—the pity of it all! He stopped once more to look at the home he had planned so joyously for his young wife. And he must lose it now, after he had sacrificed for it his honour, and with the honour everything that was worth having in life. To have lost it at first were bad enough. It was all that was left to him to-day, and he clung to it desperately—for Esther's sake.

It is easier, in a fit of self-scorn, to hurl from the soul a pressing temptation than persistently to hold that temptation at bay. Franklin Heathcote cast out the thought that all the way to his home had been his most insistent companion. And yet before many minutes it was once again his intimate associate, and this time he forgot to call himself either madman or fool.

Slowly it evolved itself from a wild, impossible dream into a feasible plan, to be accepted or rejected—this thought of trying to arouse public sympathy by the repetition of a step taken nearly three years before. A repetition, but with an important difference. The former deed was a theft. With a sharp sting of remorse Franklin applied to it the ugly epithet. When he broke into his own safe, and took from it money committed to him by the tax-payers, it was a theft perpetrated to hide the fact that he had not in hand the whole of the two thousand dollars he had received for taxes. Discovery had been imminent, and he had taken the rest of the money to avoid the alternative of being forced to acknowledge that he had appropriated the public funds to his own use. The trick had saved him from disgrace. It had staved off ruin. It had almost succeeded in setting him free from his difficulties. But it had cost him his peace of mind. It had doomed him to the gnawings of remorse.

The case to-day would be different. He would steal nothing—not even his own money, for nearly all that he had was in the bank. This, however, was a fact known to none but himself. He would simply break open his own safe and awaken public sympathy with a story of robbery and loss. Only a ruse—not a crime. Nobody would be the loser. There would be no theft; nothing but a piece of deception.

And he had learned wisdom by his past failure. He would carry out this scheme more warily. Nobody should suffer for his deed as they had done before.

He went into the empty house—empty for him because Esther was not in it. A slight indisposition on the part of Mrs. Ross had called Esther to her mother's side. She would be away for a day or two. Perhaps, had the face he loved been there to greet him, the horror of darkness and temptation would have fled from the soul of Franklin Heathcote. For it was a horror, this thought of re-enacting a scene the remembrance of which had been a daily torture.

It was no wonder that the man who loved Esther with a passionate love that craved for the full approval of her upright, sensitively honourable nature, should suffer intense pain at what seemed to him the necessity for still another downward step in the path of duplicity. Yet it was for her that he contemplated taking it. He could not bear—he had never been able to bear—the thought that she must lose the luxuries, and even the comforts of life. That a man like Ted Renshaw should be able to pity her—his peerless Esther—was maddening to him.

If he could have undone the past, even at the expense of suffering to Esther—that suffering being no greater than the loss of all his possessions—he would have done it. But the past could not be recalled. To take one step toward its undoing would be to bring disgrace upon the wife whom he loved better than virtue. That past must ever remain a barrier between himself and Esther. But

he could—at least it was yet possible that he could—save her from the pity of such men as Ted Renshaw.

Again and again he recoiled with something like terror from this new thought, this alternative that had so suddenly arisen between himself and despair. Again and again he told himself that the step was impossible, that if nothing but this lay between him and ruin, then let ruin come. But at every fresh assault the strong incentive of his love for Esther made Franklin's resistance weaker, and he knew, even before he acknowledged it definitely to himself, that the thought which had at first appeared but a wild impossibility was slowly forming itself from a thought into a plan.

In that long afternoon, which seemed to Franklin an ugly nightmare, the strength of the temptation lay in the argument that unless another effort were made, the suffering of the past was wasted pain. Every pang of remorse that he had endured, every strong regret that had torn his soul, became a fresh argument to confront him and to demand that the sorrow should not be rendered of no avail for lack of another effort. Looking at the past, the terrible past that could not be undone, Franklin set his teeth and vowed that so near the goal he would not turn back. Looking at the future, Esther's future, for his own seemed all pain, his soul echoed the resolve. But when he turned to the alternative he recoiled in affright, and the balance wavered and wavered while the day wore on.

It was very late in the afternoon when Franklin strode into the kitchen where Matilda Grant was making active preparations for the evening meal. At the opening of the door the redoubtable Ulysses sprang to his feet and assumed an air of bustle and haste.

"I have been called away suddenly," explained his master. "You will have to take care of the house tonight. I shall be back in the morning, perhaps before

daylight. Nobody will know that I am absent, but you had better sleep in the kitchen."

Ulysses led out the only remaining saddle horse, and Franklin was gone in a few minutes. Once he turned in his saddle, at a point where a good view of the house was to be gained.

"It is the last step downward," he murmured. "And it will secure all the rest. Successful or unsuccessful, it shall surely be the last."

Then he touched the horse's flank with his whip, and looked back no more.

It was an unaccountable, homesick longing that made Esther run away that afternoon for just one night at home to look after Franklin. She reached home as darkness fell.

"Lor, missis, de master he sho' gone away on bisness, and dere nobody but me and de ole woman to 'stain de 'sponserbility of dis yere 'stablishment," said Ulysses Grant proudly. "Don' you be 'fraid though, Mrs. Heathcote, ma'am. Dis yere nigger not de same sort ob man pertector dat he was dat oder time when de master was done gone. He a mighty sight more capable nigger dis yere night. Ulysses Grant sho' done practised wid de use ob a gun. He sho' a dead shot now, missis. Dis nigger 'custom hisself to take de master's gun and go inter de woods. He sho' crack away till he sich a dead shot dere not a leetle cricket nor grasshopper what 'scape him. You stay right here, missis, and Ulysses Grant and de ole woman see you not take no harm."

It was foolish, perhaps, that the old memories should rush irresistibly upon Esther to-night. She could not throw them off. She lived over again the night when Franklin was away before, and the results which had grown out of it. This was different. As far as she could understand from Ulysses, Franklin had not gone a great distance away. He might be back before morning.

She went early to bed. And so it was that the house was dark and everything still when a stealthy figure came softly round, reconnoitring.

Ulysses Grant must have slept with one eye or one ear open that night. He was a heavy sleeper as a rule, but Matilda was snoring serenely when the old man raised himself slowly and cautiously in bed, and listened.

"Jes' so. I'se calc'lated nigh 'bout right dis time, I reckon. Think you'se ketched Ulysses Grant nappin', does ye?"

Then his hand fell heavily on Matilda's shoulder and gave it a rough shake.

"Hi, ole woman! Wake up!" he whispered in a suppressed shout in her ear. "I'se sho' ahead on ye dis time. Jes' you wake right up, an' don' do no jabberin'. We'se got to keep de perfundest silence. Dar's work for Ulysses Grant in de master's office, an' he want you to come right away an' see how he shoot dat thief plumb dead."

"Mercy, ole man, you jes' dreamin'," retorted Matilda sleepily.

"I shew you how I dreamin'," replied her better half sternly. "I git dat gun an' pint it at you'se head. Den if you not arise mighty quick, I pull dat trigger."

He was already preparing for his night raid. He had wisely brought his master's gun into the kitchen. Now, fully armed, he appeared by the side of the staring Matilda.

"Lor, I do b'lieve you'se right. Dar somebody in de master's office," she said excitedly.

"Cert'nly dar is," replied Ulysses loftily. "You come 'long, an' don' you make nuff noise to wake a sleepin' angel. Dis nigger gwine shoot dead dis time."

The safe was wide open, the thief—to all appearance a black man—standing before it, when Ulysses Grant pushed open the door of Franklin Heathcote's office. The burglar was evidently unprepared for the intrusion.

He turned sharply, and opened his lips as if to speak. At the same moment Ulysses Grant started back in affright.

Whatever Ulysses had expected to find in his master's office, it could not have been a veritable burglar, for as the vision of the robber at the safe appeared before him he turned with a terrified cry, only to find himself in Matilda's determined embrace.

"Stan' aside, ole woman! I sho' got to git back fur nuff to take aim," he shouted.

His voice shook as perceptibly as the fingers that by luck rather than premeditation at that instant touched the trigger of the gun. With the report one sharp sound, half exclamation, half cry, broke from the burglar's lips. Then there was a heavy thud.

"I've done killed him dead!"

As the robber fell, the courage of Ulysses suddenly revived. He rushed into the room with the exultant exclamation on his lips.

"Lor me!" cried Matilda, going with shaking hands to hold the lamp barely a foot from the fallen man's face. "Ulysses Grant, dat ain't no nigger. What you done? Dat de blessed master hisself."

Ulysses Grant was also staring into the face—black as that of any negro—of the man who had been caught robbing Franklin Heathcote's safe. For a minute the tongue of Ulysses, that tongue that had never before been found at a loss, was speechless.

"Dat sho' de gospel truf," he said at last slowly. "It de master, sho' nuff. He done turned hisself into a nigger and come a-stealin' his own money. Lor, Ulysses Grant, you'se a plumb big fool arter all! Ah me! Ah me!"

His wail rang out in weird horror, blood-curdling enough in the dead of night.

"Hush up! Hev you plumb forgot de missis. Lor, dis'll kill her sho'."

The warning came too late. A tall figure was stand-

ing motionless in the doorway. How much had she already heard? Another moment and she had crossed the room and was kneeling by her husband's side, looking into the still face.

"Franklin!"

She tore open his clothing and felt for his heart. It had ceased beating. Her hand touched his—her white one lying against his black one.

"Franklin! Franklin, my husband!"

She looked from the prostrate figure to the safe—broken open as it had been on that night, three years ago. Did she understand?

Ulysses Grant's bullet had passed right through the heart. Esther needed no doctor to tell her Franklin was dead. Rapidly she investigated for herself. Then, with the aid of the negroes, she carried him to his own room.

"Oh, Franklin, my husband, my husband! If it had come in any way but this!"

She was looking at the face, black as that of Ulysses himself, and at the hands that showed the line of white above the wrist. No other saw those hands and that face as she saw them. When Mrs. Ross knocked peremptorily at the door and demanded admittance, Esther let her in. The face upon the bed was white as her own then.

"Is it true, Esther?"

With a bitter cry the young wife turned and threw herself upon her knees by her husband's side.

"He is my husband. His shame is mine," she said. "Yes, and I would not have it otherwise."

Her forehead rested against the hand that had grown cold.

"My child, come home."

Mrs. Ross was kneeling by her daughter's side. She drew her head down upon her own shoulder. A long time it rested there. Then it was lifted.

"Mother, we do not know what drove him to this. We must not judge him. *I* could not, for to me he was all good. But—because I love him—I must right this wrong."

Then the room was still, and Esther looked down at her husband's face.

## CHAPTER XXX.

"I DONE said de Lord had a way out for his chillen. Lor, de sun never sot yit, widout risin' agin. De blackness o' night sho' revolves away and rolls round de glory of de blessed, shinin' sun. Bless de Lord dat he make his face to shine on my lil' gal."

Uncle Pete stood in the little restaurant at Pratt City, a clean table-cloth half unfolded on the table before him. He had forgotten to finish spreading it. His eyes were fixed on the window, but he did not see the figures passing in the street. He was looking again at his "lil' gal's" face as he saw it half an hour ago, quivering with an unexpected joy.

"De Lord's done removed de burden of disgrace from de shoulders of dem two chillen," he said. "Dey's borne it in darkness and sorrer and sore heaviness, but now he's lifted his hand and sweeped it plumb away. Dey can hold up dey heads agin, and feel dat de shame and de darkness is rolled away like a cloud."

It was long before the old man's thoughts were recalled to present surroundings. They had ample excuse for wandering, for the little house in Pratt City had experienced an upheaval of joy that left others besides Uncle Pete bewildered with gladness. The stain that had been fastened upon the name of Free Stanlin by the decision of twelve white jurors was wiped away. Men knew now that the young negro had not stolen Franklin Heathcote's money.

To-day's post had brought a letter from a coloured man, an old neighbour who lived near to West Stanlin's plantation. It told of Franklin Heathcote's death, and of much that had happened since. With it came a county newspaper. Then Free and Magnolia read the

story of Esther's sorrow, and her efforts to undo the wrong to which her husband's act had led. She had insisted upon a thorough investigation of his affairs. That investigation brought to light the fact that about the time of the former robbery he had made a large reduction in his private debts. No positive proof that he had taken and used public money was found, but opinion veered strongly round, and Free Stanlin was practically cleared of the accusation made against him.

Even to a man who has not long to live in the world, the world's opinion means something. Magnolia had never before seen upon Free's face the look she saw there to-day.

"I thought you would always have cause to be ashamed of the name I gave you," he said. "This makes everything different."

She looked at him with eyes that smiled through the tears.

If it had only come sooner! In spite of the joy, Magnolia could not help the cry that rose in her heart. Yet she rejoiced with him with exceeding gladness, and went at last to her cooking duties at the restaurant with a bewilderment of joy which made it almost a marvel that the tables did not show some strange new mixtures among the viands.

And Betsey forgot everything, and hovered round her boy, watching him with a wistful, tender delight that brought her back again and again from the kitchen to remind him of some fresh phase of this unexpected relief.

It had come so suddenly, and it was so complete. West's head was held fully an inch higher from the moment when he realized that men had no longer a right to say a word against a Stanlin.

"We ain't lost everything yet," he said, standing in the kitchen and looking at Betsey. "They've robbed us of about all, but they ain't clean downed the Stanlins now."

"It's him I'm thinkin' of," said Betsey, with a sob in her voice. "He's my boy Free that I thanked heaven for. He's free from the stain that was put on him by no fault of his. His name can stand out honourable to the end. Father, the worst's over. We've done reached the bottom and we'se a-goin' up. There's the land beyond, where all nations and kingdoms and peoples and tongues is gathered together. I reckon there won't be no white feelin' among all them peoples. He's goin' there, and there ain't nothin' remainin' agin him, and we'll soon be a-joinin' him. It don't make no differ now about the plantation. He ain't wantin' it, and we ain't."

"H'm! I'd a heap rather that white lawyer hadn't got it though," said West.

The influence of the good news that had come to him gave strength to the hand of Free Stanlin. Magnolia found him standing the next day before a picture upon which he had already done much work. He had laid it aside of late, as too great an effort for him. It was larger and more elaborate than anything he had yet attempted. He had begun it with some enthusiasm, but weakness and weariness had overtaken him, and he had put it aside. Now, with strength renewed by the gladness of this practical acquittal, he was working at it again. Magnolia watched him as he worked, with a sorrowful pride that was half gladness and half pain.

"I should like to hear what Mr. Blanshard has to say to it," Free remarked. "I wish I could get to his place myself."

Then he laughed.

"Would it make any difference, I wonder, if he knew a negro painted it?" he said, standing back and viewing the picture.

He knew it was the best he had done yet. The old love of his art had taken hold of him again. He felt as if he could handle the brush with a freedom he had

not known since he painted his last picture in his father's house at the plantation.

"It is almost good enough to attract attention," he said, putting the last touches to it about a week after the load of a false accusation was lifted from him. "Ask Mr. Blanshard to give it a good place in his window. I should think he would be willing to do so. It doesn't seem to me conceit to fancy it deserves it."

He stood looking at the picture with a smile on his face. Then he packed it carefully and gave it into Magnolia's charge.

She found the art dealer decidedly amiable. He praised her husband's work more cordially than ever before, and looked at the new painting with an admiration which he did not entirely disguise.

"First rate. You must tell your husband that he will not long be able to hide so fully behind his work," he said, with a mixture of friendliness, caution, and patronage that produced a somewhat peculiar effect on the listener. "People are beginning to ask questions. I have exerted myself to give Mr. Stanlin all the benefit of my influence among art lovers. It is working. If he goes on as well as this, I have much hope of being able to push him forward. He may yet become famous."

Half angry at his assumption, more than half pleased at what he had told her, Magnolia left the shop of the little great man. Joy and sorrow were striving together. Oh, the pity of it all! Freedom from a false accusation, and success in the art he loved, had both come—and come too late. Magnolia's heart ached while it rejoiced. Free would be glad, very glad that his pictures were succeeding. She was glad and proud herself, but how could she help the pain when she knew that gladness and success were only for a season—and a short season. She did not hide it from her heart, the heart that ached to breaking.

But she hurried back to tell the good news to Free. He would be anxious, for he had set much hope upon the picture. And the report she was carrying was all good. She would not keep him waiting.

She did not know it, but he was not waiting, or even thinking of the painting. It had become, for the time, of secondary importance. For there had come to the little home in Pratt City one whose business was with Free Stanlin, and with West and Betsey. When Esther entered that house, a tall figure in the deepest mourning, she threw back the veil that hid her white, grief-stricken face. Free met her at the door of the room. She held out both her hands.

"I have come to ask for pardon—for him," she said, lifting her sorrowful eyes, that had no trace of pride in them now, to the young man's face.

"Honey, it's what we all needs."

Betsey's motherly hand was on her arm. As for Free, he had taken those outstretched hands in his sympathetically.

"Mrs. Heathcote," he said, "I wish he were here, that I might assure him, as I do you, that the plea is unnecessary. I think I understand. It would have cost him everything to clear me. And my own act entangled me in the disaster. It was not that he did not care, but that he was too deeply involved."

She looked at him gratefully.

"Care?" she said. "He knew no peace after he heard that you were accused. He—"

The white, pained face had grown whiter. Esther's words ceased. She turned quickly, and let Betsey's arms encircle her. Just now she needed the support they afforded. For one moment Betsey felt the form she held quiver. Then Esther hid her face on the friendly shoulder and the tears came.

"He was weak," she whispered, "but he did not do it coldly and without pain."

"I knows, honey," said Betsey quickly. "We all knows. It takes a mighty lot of courage, honey, to shoulder a sin. Don't you think we'se got any hard feelin'. My po' chile's suffered—we'se all suffered—but we ain't a-hatin', and we ain't a-judgin'. We'se sorrowin' together, honey."

And the sorrowing together did more to soothe the pain of Esther's grief than anything else had done.

The face of a certain art dealer in the city of Birmingham had grown hard and cold. The dealer was looking at a picture that in itself could hardly account for the expression of his countenance. He had admired that picture once. Many people besides himself had admired it since. But he had taken it from his window and put it in an inconspicuous place in his shop. He had a little pile of paintings by the same hand stowed away on a shelf. They were not waiting for a purchaser, but for the appearance of the owner. The art dealer was not offering these pictures for sale now. It was some weeks since he had offered any of them, though they had been selling well. He was wondering, with a hard anger in the wonder, why the wife of the artist did not make her appearance. He had not seen her for a long time.

When she came at last, the dealer put on his most distant and distinctly forbidding manner.

"Ah! Mrs. Stanlin. It is a long time since you were here last," he said, and the tone of the words made them almost an accusation.

She did not notice it.

"Is it sold—the last picture?" she asked breathlessly. "I did not see it in the window."

"Certainly you did not," replied the shopkeeper loftily. "It is not in the window. You will never see it there again."

"Then it is sold?" she said, voice and manner betraying a deep disappointment.

"That does not follow," was the haughty answer. "It is *not* sold, nor likely to be. I have done enough selling pictures in the dark, without knowing who painted them. You are mistaken, my good woman, if you think this art emporium is a place where a nigger can pass off his work for that of an artist, without being found out. I have already done too much of such selling. I have unintentionally deceived my patrons. I have now been undeceived myself."

She looked at him for a moment, bewildered.

"You can tell your husband," he continued, "that he need send no more of his daubs here. I should not think of insulting my art customers by offering to them the work of a darky. Don't bring me any more."

He stopped. He had caught the light in Magnolia's eyes.

"Do not trouble," she said, in a low tone that had in it, like her eyes, the power to scorch. "I shall not bring any more. On the contrary I came to take these away. I was afraid that the last was sold. It is worth far more to me than it can be to you, or to any of your customers. You will have no more of my husband's work. He is dead."

THE END.

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